Haiti SV3

793
787

[Information on the _bocô_ or _bocor_ as a diviner will be found in category 791.]

a mat or a cloth, supported in a reclining position with pillows 844 and cloths, or on a covered box standing about a foot from the ground, with her legs drawn up. No fire is built in the house, all doors and windows are tightly shut, and covers are provided against a chill. A candle stands lighted at the threshold, [768] and holy water is poured beside it; a candle is also often [782] lighted in the church before the statue of the saint who corresponds to the *vodun* deity under whose protection the woman in labor is thought to be. In the room with her is the midwife and as many as six, seven, eight, or nine older women belonging to the families of the woman and her husband. The hands of the woman are made to rest on her knees, but where labor is prolonged, her arms are supported above her head to afford relief. She is three times given very hot tea or a drink made of [757] the stewed leaves of the mango tree and of the *bois lait*. The midwife, with palm oil on her hands, watches the rhythm of labor and presses on the abdomen to facilitate delivery.

If it becomes evident that this will be difficult, a *vodun* 845 priest is at once called to determine by divination whether or 743 not the deities who have been propitiated are satisfied. If the 787● answer is a negative one, he promises future sacrifices or gives 782 minor offerings immediately. Care is also taken to ascertain [775] whether the trouble is due to the discontent of the family dead who may have been angered by neglect to wear mourning for them, or because sacrifices or a *service* due them have been delayed too long. Inquiries are similarly made to determine whether the spirits of twins might not be displeased, [754] while the possibility that evil magic may have been invoked is not overlooked, especially if the husband has several wives. If the inquiry shows that the magic of a co-wife was responsible, a strong counter-charm is made at once. Should the woman in 845 labor eventually die, however, her death is not considered to 766 be the result of any act of infidelity on her part, and does not, as in other Negro cultures, prevent the usual burial and mourning customs being carried out.

its good health or good looks or some other attribute may unwittingly bring harm to it. For such reasons the child is often burned slightly on the cheek, a ritual carried out by the vodun priest in order that the scar may "give one with evil intentions toward the child an 'occupation' to divert his attention, that would otherwise be devoted to carrying out some evil design." 854 754

There is some question as to whether, as in so many Negro cultures, the child is given a special name at birth which is regarded as sacred and a thing to be concealed. In one instance it was stated that while one's "real" name was that given at the time of the Church baptism, everyone has a "nickname" (*petit nom*) that is known to the father and mother alone until the child is old enough to guard its secret character. This name is never spoken aloud, for if an enemy came to know it, he might use it for purposes of black magic against its owner. However, no agreement exists in Mirebalais as to this practice, which may represent a survival of a widespread West African custom.[8] 553 551 [754]

A child born with a caul is believed to be "strong" in combating all evil spirits. The caul is dried and reduced to powder, and the infant is given some of the powder in water two or three days after birth. If a child is born with the navel cord wrapped about his throat, he is believed by some to be destined for leadership, though others do not hold this to be a significant omen. A child born feet-foremost is regarded with distaste, so that where possible, he is turned about in the womb to facilitate a head presentation. If this cannot be done, the child when he grows up is reproached: "You came like a demon." More often, however, if a child with breech presentation is not stillborn, it is not believed that he will long survive. All such occurrences are attributed to bad magic, and the husband does not delay to seek out a diviner to discover for him what supernatural forces had caused the evil. 845 [787]

Breast-feeding begins on the third day, but if the milk does

are necessary, and the elders of the family must see to it that 585
these gods are instructed not to trouble the newly married 782
pair. If either or both of them are devotees of deities such 776
as Damballa, Erzilie, Ogun, or Aida Wedo, all of whom are
known to be extremely jealous, these gods must be specially
placated.

For the actual ceremony the couple appear each with a 585
candle in hand, pour water on the ground in the family house 782
of worship, and kneel and pray. The god may "come to 787 ●
the head" of the girl or the man or some relative of each and
advise them. If it asks a gift at this time, it is either given at
the moment or a promise is made to fulfill the request later.
If the spirit objects to the marriage, it is wooed with offerings.
Thus, for example, should the young woman be possessed
by the serpent-god Damballa, who, speaking through
his devotee, registered an objection to the marriage, the girl
would be given such gifts as a white silk dress, white silk
stockings, or some other valued object in the sacred color of
the god, or some perfume which might also serve to mollify
him. Or should the man's deity who registered objection be
Ogun, the god of war, a fine red kerchief might be offered [822]
in honor of this god, whose color is red.*

The dead of both families are also notified by means of a 585
visit to the cemetery. The days for these pilgrimages are Mondays 769
or Fridays, and the pilgrimages must be made during 782
either the morning or the early afternoon, since visits at night
are only for evil purposes. As candles are lighted, announcement
is made to the family dead of the marriage which is soon
to take place, and their good offices are asked to bring it happiness.
After all the family dead have been invoked, a candle is [776]
lighted before the large cross for Baron Samedi, and another
behind it for Gede, the first as the ruler of cemeteries and the
graves of the dead, and the second as his handy-man. Another
candle is lighted for the "abandoned souls" of the
family, who have died without consecration, and yet another

[P 138 is blank]

CHAPTER VIII

WHAT IS "VOODOO"?

MORE than any other single term, the word "voodoo" is 771
called to mind whenever mention is made of Haiti. Conceived as a grim system of African practices, it has come to be identified with fantastic and cruel rites and to serve as a symbol of daring excursions into the esoteric. Not only has emphasis been placed on its frenzied rites and the cannibalism supposed on occasion to accompany them, but its dark mysteries of magic and "zombis" have been so stressed that it has become customary to think of the Haitians as living in a universe of psychological terror.

What, then, is "voodoo"? "Voodoo," or *vodun*, as it will
be termed here, following native pronunciation, is a complex
of African belief and ritual governing in large measure the
religious life of the Haitian peasantry.[1] It also has an even 184
more restricted meaning in Mirebalais, where the word often 771
simply denotes a form of sacred dance accompanied by spirit- 535
possession or merely a dance which on occasion may take its 789 ●
place along with the *calenda*, the *martinique*, the *zeste*, and
other social dances at public celebrations, where an occurrence of possession would be rare and in questionable taste.
This latter meaning was recognized by St. Mery: 171

> "The Calenda and the Chica are not the only dances 771
> in the colony which have come from Africa. There is an- 535

of the dead must be deferred for a later chapter. Similarly, the 776
discussion of the final element in Haitian religion, the belief in magic, must also be reserved for later pages, stressing here only its separate identity from the worship of the *loa*, with which it has been too often confused.[30]

The most striking element in the *vodun* cult is the manner 787
in which the gods possess their devotees. Despite the fact that 791
this is the aspect of Haitian religion that seems to the casual observer its least restrained and least disciplined, possession occurs according to well-defined rules and under specifically defined circumstances. And since it is through an analysis of possession that the clearest understanding can be reached of the meaning of the *loa* to those who worship them, the manner in which they influence the lives of their devotees and exert their powers for good or evil, possession may be treated at some length.[31]

794
When a person is possessed for the first time, the spirit 789
which is said to animate him is known as a *loa bossal*, an "un- 776
tamed" god. The word *bossal*, which in the early days was ap- [192]
plied to newly arrived Africans,[32] has always been a term of contumely, and today the same feeling-tone is continued through the belief that since all things in the universe are subject to observable regulation, and animals and plants and human beings must all live according to these rules, the *loa*, as members of society, may not manifest the unrestrained and often dangerous traits of unpredictable behavior which characterize them before they have been "baptized" and thus brought under proper control.

Baptism of a deity most often occurs when a boy or girl is possessed by a family *loa*, especially if it is one which gives that knowledge of healing and divination meant by the word *connaissance*. Sometimes, though not always, this possession is violent, and the prospective devotee rages about the house, destroying whatever comes to hand. On occasion, since custom frowns on possession at a ceremony not given by the family of

787 the one possessed, possessions of this kind mean either that the
776 *loa* needs baptism; or that, being baptized, its devotee has
been negligent in serving the god.

796 No actual rite of baptism of a *loa* — or, as it is also termed,
776 of *lavé tête*, "washing the head" — was witnessed, but the
794 account of the ceremony given here, obtained independently
from several persons, represents an adequate exposition of the
rite as performed in Mirebalais. A room is prepared where the
person whose *loa* is to be baptized must remain for three days.
The mat or bed on which the neophyte rests is covered with
fresh sheets and pillow-cases, and three changes of clothing
are made ready, one of which must be entirely new for the
last day of the ceremony. These are in the color of the god
[822] being "baptized"; that is, if the *loa* were revealed to be such
a one as Damballa, Aida Wedo, or Gran' Ezilie, everything
would be white, but if it were Gran' Siligbo, the colors would
be blue and white; if Ogun, everything would be red; if Ossange, blue; where the god is one of the Pétro suite, such as
'Ti Kita or Bosu, everything would be black.*

During the three days' "retreat" the one whose *loa* is being
consecrated lies alone. All day long the men and women of the
family sit in the next room or outside the house, singing and
praying, though at night they sleep, since "this is not a wake."
[533] They not only sing the songs sacred to the *loa* being baptized,
but also the canticles of the Virgin, while prayers of the
Church are recited under the leadership of the *prêt' savanne*,
the "bush-priest" whose ability to read the prayers makes him
an essential figure in all *vodun* rites. They may from time to
time have "a little procession" about the room where the
novitiate lies, when small banners in the color of the god are
[782] carried. Soft drinks and a *mangé sec* — a "dry" offering —
are given the god, and white tapers and an oil lamp are

---

* A detailed listing of the names, attributes, and powers of the more widely worshipped *loa*, the colors, days, and trees or other places sacred to them, and the "squads" into which they are conceived to be formed, will be found in an appendix at the end of this book.

994

776
776

lighted. Chicken and rice may also be cooked for any god except Gede, while chocolate and rice with milk are favored, since it is said "the *loa* love desserts" — a commentary on the very immediate and human character of these spirits. [782]

The actual baptism, or "washing of the head," is performed on the third day of the ceremony by a *vodun* priest or priestess who is a member of the family, though any member who has important *loa* and the necessary *connaissance* may officiate if the membership of the family includes no priest. As at any baptism, there must be a godfather and godmother, and preference is given those who are the parents of twins or are themselves twins. The officiant must be possessed at the time, since, it is said, "one *loa* baptizes another." Leaves of the basilique tree are steeped in perfumed cold water, and the hands of the one who baptizes are first immersed in the liquid; then, while songs of the *loa* and canticles of the Virgin are sung, he washes the head of the person to be baptized. Possession occurs immediately, and the new devotee lies back, half conscious, while all others kneel, seeking word from the *loa* to learn if it is satisfied. If an affirmative answer is given, all retire, the person possessed remaining in the room to sleep through the night. A "ball," but not a *vodun* dance, may celebrate the event either the next day or later, but this is not obligatory, and most often those present, after eating, quietly disperse. The following day the one who has been baptized goes to the family place of worship and greets those who have helped him. Only one further rite is necessary, and this solely when the *loa bossal* is revealed to be a hostile god. Then the *loa*, after having been baptized, is "restrained" by being placed in a jar and buried, so it cannot later emerge and trouble the family of the one to whom it has come.[18]

[793] [596] [208] [787] [824] [533] [789] [529]

The ceremony of baptism, in Mirebalais, is in no sense a first step into any *vodun* hierarchy, for, as will be seen, no such hierarchy exists in this valley. One important priest there derives his power from *loa* that have never been bap- [793]

786 [illegible] 776 (773) tized at all, but merely respond to an innate ability to control them. To have a baptized *loa*, then, merely means that the worship of the *loa* is thereafter carried on in regular form. The worshipper learns how to *marré*, or "tie,"[14] his spirit, so as to enjoy the social aspects of a *vodun* dance without fear (782) that his *loa* will come unbidden. He gives it small offerings from time to time, and if it becomes insistent, or if his family is being troubled by its gods, he takes full part in the rituals that are staged.[15]

787 776 774 In native idiom, a person when possessed is "mounted" by his god, and thereafter becomes his *ch'wal*, or "horse." A devotee may come under the influence of a number of spirits during a single ceremony or dance, one *loa* succeeding another. The first deity that ever came to a person, however, for him constitutes the chief of his gods — his *mait' tête* — and the leader of any deities which may subsequently possess him. (784) It is this *loa* alone that is "baptized," and this one alone "taken from his head" at his death; and, as far as he is concerned, all his other gods are under the control of this *mait' tête*, so that any agreement which he may enter into with this principal spirit must be respected by all the others.

Fundamentally, to be possessed by a *loa* means that an individual's spirit is literally dispossessed by that of the god. Personalities undergo radical change in accordance with the nature of the deity,[16] while even the sex of the one possessed is disregarded if it differs from that of the god, so that, for example, a woman "mounted" by Ogun is always addressed as Papa Ogun.[17] One wears the colors of the god and the ornaments he likes, eating and drinking those things he prefers, and otherwise manifesting his peculiar characteristics — rolling on the earth, if possessed by Damballa or chattering incessantly if by Gede.[18]

787 781 774 Not everyone, by any means, is subject to states of possession. If the existence of individual differences in the capacity for religious expression be recognized, it becomes apparent

787
781
794

that while some react to the supernatural with immediate and overwhelming emotion, and others, though incapable of as deep a response, do sense the mysteries of possession, there are still others who go through life without ever feeling this religious "thrill." In native explanation, it is the former to whom the gods manifest themselves, who become the *ch'wal* of their *loa;* while to the latter the deities never make themselves known. Scientifically, the phenomenon of possession in Negro cultures, at least, is as yet unsatisfactorily explained, largely because of the almost complete absence of adequate reports on the background and incidence of specific cases. Perhaps the most satisfactory approach to its understanding is through a consideration of it in terms of differences in nervous instability, which may be thought of as predisposing different persons to experience the religious thrill in different degrees; or, in other terms, by reference to their differing susceptibility to suggestion. One must reject an hypothesis which (114)
attempts to explain the *vodun* cult of Haiti in terms of the neuroses, even when, as in the admirable exposition of Dr. Dorsainvil, the approach neglects neither accepted genetic theory in stressing the inheritance of neurotic tendencies in voduist family lines, nor the important historical forces which have been operative.[19] For in terms of the patterns of Haitian religion, possession is not abnormal, but normal; it is set in its cultural mold as are all other phases of conventional living. That it gives release from psychic tension does not alter the case; neither does the fact that it offers a way to the satisfaction of unfulfilled desires, as when the god, speaking through a woman under possession, demands a necklace or bracelet which, though forever the property of the god, will be worn by his devotee. These facts merely emphasize the compensatory character of the phenomenon. The social situation of the individual also enters; some undoubtedly simulate possession for the attention it brings them, while a person who experiences no serious difficulties in the course of his life is perhaps never

794 787 called upon to ask whether or not he is properly serving his
781 gods; is never placed in a situation for which possession would
[114] be a release. Hence to consider all possession as something which falls within the range of psychopathology is to approach it handicapped by a fundamental misconception.

787 794 The best evidence of the socially normal nature of possession is the existence of rules governing its incidence which are well understood by all. Not everyone who is a *ch'wal* may become possessed at any dance or *service*, for the gods, if properly under control, are permitted to come only to members of the family giving the rite. At one *vodun* dance given by a priest where a number of other *hungans*, present as guests, became possessed, the host was regarded as having taken undue advantage of his visitors by bringing on their possessions. In another case Haitians from the southern peninsula who were temporarily residing in Mirebalais carefully refrained from contact with a certain *vodun* priest lest he bring on possession by their gods. At one dance for the Rada gods, the *loa* Taureau, a Pétro deity, possessed one of the drummers. Because a Pétro *loa* was neither expected nor wanted, the man was immediately removed and, when quieted, sent home. A similar situation developed at another Rada dance where Boss "came"; the person possessed was at once taken outside the enclosure until his god had left him. If a *loa* persists in dancing at a *vodun* dance given by another family, it is either one of these *loa bossal* already described, or a *loa vagabond*, and may be scolded by the *hungan:* " You must not come here! You are not wanted! Go home where you belong! " The passion with
[781] which a person resists his god when he feels possession coming on at a rite not given by his own family is particularly instructive. Men have been seen holding so tightly to the rafters of the shelter under which the dance was being held that the muscles of their forearms formed great cords, while beads of
[782] perspiration rolled down their foreheads.[illegible] A person who must live away from his family for a long time usually takes

steps to " feed " his *loa* in order to satisfy it, for it is more im- 782
portant to give offerings to the spirits than to dance for them. 782
He therefore either quietly prepares a sacrifice of cereals and 774
liquor in his own room or sends money home so that his *loa*
may be " fed " at the family habitation, and his absence ex-
plained to it.[illegible] 794

When vodun deities are discussed in Mirebalais, most often 776
two " companies " of them are mentioned, the Rada and the 178
Pétro " squads." In one list of gods that was obtained, the [192]
word *Rada*, derived from the name of the ancient principality [103]
of Allada in Dahomey, called forth the explanation " *qui veut*
dire Dahomey — which is to say, Dahomey," though it should
be made clear that neither the words *Rada* nor *Dahomey* are
any longer recognized in Haiti as place-names, being today
simply qualifying designations of *loa*. There are regional dif- [184]
ferences in the number and ranking of other categories of
gods that hold no important place in Mirebalais. The exist-
ence of these other categories is, of course, well known, and
one person referred to " the seventeen and twenty-one classes
of *loa*," of which, however, only the following were named:
Rada, Pétro, Dahomey, Guinée, Congo, Nago, Ibo, and Wan-
gol. Of these the Congo and the Ibo gods are well known,
though their worship is chiefly restricted to individual fami-
lies, while the Nago and Dahomey categories, though signifi-
cant from the point of view of indicating African origins, are
most commonly grouped under the term *Rada*. Guinée also
occasionally figures in worship as carried on in individual
families, but this term is more often understood as a general
designation for all *loa* outside the Rada, Nago, Congo, and Ibo
groupings and for certain Pétro gods. Wangol derives from
the geographical entity Angola.

From comparatively early times the impression has been 776
given that certain of these classes of gods perform only good, 794
and others evil. Nothing could be further from the truth than
this attempt to read European concept into Haitian ideology.

a stream, there to remain until, becoming impatient, it demands to be taken out. A ceremony then brings back the tortured soul and makes of it a "*loa nan canarie* — a *loa* in a jar" — which thereafter acts as a guard for its family. 793 [illegible] 775

There is little agreement as to the place of residence of the *loa*. In general, it is believed that they come from Guinée each time they are called, returning when they have, in the native idiom, "descended from the heads of their horses" — that is, when the possession of their devotees has ceased. Those "under the water," however, being Haitians, remain in Haiti for seven years until the ceremony just mentioned, of putting them *nan canarie*, has been performed, when they, like the other *loa*, return to *Guinée*. At the same time, all recognise the African character of the *loa*, whether they be gods brought from Africa or the Créole *loa* from Haiti itself. 794 776 789

Worship of the *loa* is directed by priests of the cult. The terms *papaloi* and *mamaloi* as designations for male and female priests, almost universally employed by non-Haitian writers, are practically unknown in Mirebalais, where, as in most regions of Haiti, a priest is called a *hungan*, a priestess a *mambu*.[24] Besides the *hungan* (or *mambu*), and the *gangan*, a term applied to a *hungan* of renown, is the *bocor*, a practitioner of magic, not a member of any *vodun* priesthood, but a man who has acquired his power by the purchase of spirits. He is particularly differentiated from the *hungan* and *mambu* by the fact that the *loa* of their own accord are believed to have given "*connaissance*" — the knowledge of healing and helping, to these latter.[25] Not all gods can endow their devotees with this *connaissance*. Some of the Rada deities, in addition to those of the Ogun group who give it, are Legba, Damballa, Aizan, Bosu, St. Jean, and Agwe Woyo; among the Pétro gods it is conferred by Bosu Trois Cornes, Simbi d'leau, Gede, Ossange, Malt' Gran' Bois, and Malt' Calfou (Carrefour). Simbi en Deux Eaux and Simbi Proméné both give magic power, the former conferring knowledge of excellent protectives against 793 776 184 791 755 [illegible] [illegible] (791)

793 776 755 werewolves as well as of the ingredients to concoct healing baths. Certain priests worship and control a large number of deities, as is shown by those which comprise the personal pantheon of a *gangan* from the valley of Mirebalais: Gedenibo, Erzilie Gé Rouge; 'Ti Kita Demembré; Simbi en Deux Eaux; Bumba Trois Îlé; Legba; St. Jacques; Ogun Ferraille, Ogun Balandjo, Ogun Ashade; Lemba; Aizan Keleké, Aizan Wedo, Aida Wedo, Damballa Wedo; Baron Samedi, Bosu Trois Cornes; Congo Wangol, Malt' Mapou; Agasu; Agwe, Agweto Woyo; Kadia-Bosu; Sobo Gran'; l'Afrique Guinée. Whatever his ability, the *hungan* can cure only diseases "sent by man" — that is, those caused by magic — and by the *loa*, since against illness sent by God he can do nothing. [521] Gossip disapprovingly whispers how in more than one instance a *hungan* took advantage of his position and the trust of his clients, falsely to represent himself as able to cure an illness "sent by God" through stating it was due to magic.

793 ●787 An important function of the *hungan* or *mambu* is to foretell the future, and it is as a diviner that the *vodun* priest or priestess is most often employed. No major rite would be considered by a family unless divination were resorted to, but consultation is made for a far wider range of affairs than those of a purely religious nature, and no proposed undertaking of any importance in the secular field is begun without visiting a diviner to discover whether or not the fates are propitious. When divining, the priest is usually under possession by his gods, but other methods, such as gazing into a crystal or basin of water, may also be employed. Several divining séances were visited, but no description of them need be given here, since a number of accounts, including an especially full one by Parsons, are available.[36]

793 184 [755] [787] Though a certain hierarchy seems to exist among the *vodun* priests in other districts of Haiti, in Mirebalais the organization of the cult is informal to an extreme degree.[37] In the minds of the cult members, various priests in the same region

CHAPTER IX

VODUN WORSHIP: THE SERVICE

794
776 THE *loa* make known their desires by means of possessing
782 their devotees and speaking through them, or by divination,
[789] and if these desires are not gratified, they will mildly harass
the family of their devotees, until, thoroughly angered, they will seek full vengeance for this neglect.[1] Fortunately, the wants of many of the gods are modest, and they are satisfied if a candle is occasionally lighted, some water "thrown away" in the place of worship, and they are kept informed of family happenings. But when the *loa* finally clamor for a sacrifice, the time when it is to be made is deferred until the necessary preparations can be completed, for the attitude of the Haitians toward the gods in such matters, as one explained it, is that "*Mystère c'est 'ti moun, faut les derigé*—The *loa* are like children, and must be told what to do," and "If the *loa* are promised a sacrifice, they must accept the date set by the one who serves them." But when that date arrives, the ceremony must be held or the *loa* will cause their worshippers much trouble. This does not mean that a poor person, or one who has met with reverses, may not plead with his god and count on being permitted to defer the offering if he is unable to provide what is asked.

Simple annual rites are held for the gods in January, each 78
family giving small offerings in its house of worship to its own 716
deities. These minor ceremonies are not to be confused with
the extended rituals which a family may perform but once in
a decade or a generation. Because of the extensive preparation
and large outlay these entail, such rites are often postponed
from year to year. According to some, this postponement is
sought through an *action de grâce,* based on Church ritual,
while others maintain that it is but necessary on his special
day to appeal to the deity who is troubling the family, give
a small offering — à *mangé sec* — and ask for the desired res-
pite. This may be done several times, until crop failures, sud- [793]
den deaths, and the loss of valuable property begin to afflict the [787] ●
family, whereupon the family head seeks out a *hungan,* who
by divination determines the supernatural forces that are re-
sponsible for these misfortunes; and when his statement that
the gods have reached the end of their patience is confirmed
independently by several other priests who are consulted, ac-
tive preparations for the major rite are finally set in motion.

Any such important ceremony must be held on the ancestral 346
habitation, and centers in the *maison de servitude,* the family 778
house of service for the gods. The house itself, to be differen- 794
tiated from the *humfort,* or "temple" of the *vodun* priest, 78
may be elaborate or simple in accordance with the status of
family members in the *vodun* cult.[3] At one end of the sacred
house is a platform about two and one half feet high on which [776]
are placed calabash plates for the *loa,* six for the Créole
deities, three for the Mystères Guinée, and a white plate with
a "thunder stone," or Neolithic celt, and a necklace for Dam-
balla. Not all *cailles mystères* are painted, but some, it is said, [353]
are green "for hope," and some red "for victory," while one [532]
was said to have designs of flowers and snakes painted on the
wall above the platform.[4] These houses usually have two rec-
tangular rooms, each with a separate entrance and each hav-
ing its platform at the narrow end facing the doorway. One of [776]

CHAPTER X

VODUN WORSHIP: THE DANCE

THE *vodun* dance, the most public aspect of Haitian peasant 796
ritual, has been more frequently observed and reported on
than any other rites of the cult. The worship of the *loa* by an [778]
individual, the baptism of his *loa*, and the minor periodic sacrifices he makes to it that it may protect him are entirely private in nature, while presence at the *service* for the *loa* is essentially restricted to members of the family. The *vodun* dance, [203]
however, is viewed quite differently, for news of it is widely spread by word of mouth, so that, in contrast to the private character of all other rituals, *vodun* dances are important social occasions, and their success is measured by the numbers in attendance and the enthusiasm of the participants which makes a dance *chaud'* — "hot"[1]

The *vodun* dance may be said to function in several ways. 796
Above all, it is an integral part of the worship of the *loa*, and 787
as such is marked by repeated possessions which indicate the presence of the gods. Yet it also offers an important opportunity for recreation, as is indicated by the fact that in Mirebalais the term *bamboche*, which means a dance at which one merely enjoys oneself, is often applied to it. By no means do all who go to a dance become possessed, for of one hundred to one hundred and fifty persons present, no more than twenty or twenty-five will come under the power of their gods. The old 000

Saturday nights. This is not because of the especially sacred 796
character of the day, but rather because the Haitian govern- [656]
ment, in order to assure a continuous working week, refuses
permits for other days. The occasions for the dances are varied,
as is evident from those given during the course of this field-
work. One of these was that of a *hungan* as a compliment to
visitors " who knew Dahomey " and was conducted as a serious
rite in the worship of the *loa*. Two dances marked the end of
services for family gods, and were variously interpreted as
tributes to the family dead and the twins, who must not be
neglected in any religious observance, and as celebrations
offered in praise of the gods who were to protect the families,
giving the dances, to mark the " restraining " of the evil spirits
responsible for their troubles. Two other dances celebrated
the " baptism " and initial use of new sets of drums. As has 796
been pointed out, there are also non-religious occasions on 527
which *vodun* dances are given. On days of secular celebrations,
such as the anniversary of the declaration of Haitian independ-
ence, or the withdrawal of the Marines, the *vodun* dancing is
purely social, though the ritual drums are used, the sacred
songs are sung, and the steps of the dances are those seen at any
Saturday-night gathering. Added to the fact that no posses- [787]
sions or other manifestations of serious worship of the *loa* oc-
cur, the " secular " *vodun* dances differ from the others in that
they are held away from any family shrine, taking place within
towns or cities, something never permitted in their non-social,
religious counterparts.

The *vodun* dance — and in the remainder of this chapter 796
only the dance which has significance in the worship of the *loa* 346
will be considered — is patterned like all other ceremonies of
the cult.[1] It is held at a family habitation, under an open brush
shelter known as a *tonnelle*, constructed for the occasion next
to the family *maison de servitude*. If the habitation at which [787]
the dance is given is not the one where this house of worship
is found, the shelter is built near a hut so that those possessed
will have a place to retire.

796 534 533 (778) skin, are played in batteries of three, the largest being called *manman,*[3] the middle the *seconde,* and the smallest the *bula.*[4] To be used in dances, the drums, like the *loa* of the worshippers, must be "baptized," as will be seen when an account of their making and consecration is given in a later chapter. The iron, or *ogan,* usually consists of the blade of a hoe struck by a large spike, and the rattle, *açon,* in the form most often encountered, is a rounded calabash, containing seeds or pebbles. The iron and the rattles set the basic, steady beat about which the complex drum rhythms play. The smallest drum first takes the time after the iron and the rattles have begun, the notes being played with an accessory figure by means of two thin sticks. The medium-sized drum is next heard, while the *manman,* ritually the most important of the three, comes in last. The *seconde* also has two sticks, one short, thick, and straight, the other a small bow, which gives an added resilience to the notes of the drums' subsidiary rhythms. In playing the great drum, the single crooked stick, called a *baguette,* is held in the right hand, while the left strikes the drumhead with heel or fingers according to the quality of tone desired. The drumstick itself is wielded either against the skin head or against its wooden side, thus permitting a further variation in tone. 796 776 533 When "salutes" to the gods are called for by the drums, it is the voice of the *manman* that signals the sweeping circular movements of the dancers, dictating with its beat the dips and semi-prostrations of this figure in the ritual dancing, called *asagwe.* The drum rhythms are always distinctive for each type of *loa,* and every devotee knows the rhythms which call his god.

796 534 (787) The drums and iron are the focus of all activity of the dance, especially since those who are possessed dance facing the drums, in whose beat is heard the voice of the gods. Hence the spectators cluster most closely about them, for anything of significance which happens must happen here. The players of the rattles — it is but rarely that more than one rattle is not

employed — do not remain with the drummers. These instru- 796
ments are ordinarily in the hands of *hunsi*, who join the 534
massed ring of dancers that constantly circles about the center [794]
pole. These dancers are not under possession, but are merely
enjoying the evening or participating in the social aspect of
the dance preparatory to becoming possessed. The rattle is 796
held high above the heads of the dancers, and its sharp, steady 533
notes are produced by quick, short, measured movements of
the wrist. The end of a song, which sometimes does not come
until fifteen or twenty minutes after its initial statement, is
usually marked by a continuous shaking of a rattle, a process
which effectually breaks the rhythm and makes it possible to
begin a new song. The player of the rattle is an outstanding
singer, who usually initiates the fresh refrain and continues
to sing its repetitions as soloist in the alternation of solo and
chorus which marks Haitian *vodun* singing as it marks most
West African and New World Negro religious music.

When a possession occurs, the songs for the deity who has 796
"arrived" are taken up as the drums play the rhythm of 789
the god. As his possession comes on, the devotee falls to the
ground, rolling before the drums, or staggers blindly about
the dancing-space, or otherwise follows the characteristic be-
havior attributed to his god. After a time he begins to dance, [793]
whereupon a *hunsi* or the *hungan*, taking a calabash of water [794]
in one hand and a lighted candle in the other, dances opposite
him, saluting the god as he performs his every movement in re-
verse; if he turns clockwise, the one dancing with him turns
counter-clockwise; if he moves to the right, the other moves to
the left. Except when executing these turns, the functionary
of the cult never takes his eyes from the eyes of the possessed
person, almost, as it were, hypnotizing him to help him come
to himself. Eventually the possessed one recovers sufficiently
to take the candle and the calabash of water in his own hands.
Often spilling water as he moves, he makes his way to the cen- [782]
tral pole, pouring an offering and making the sign of the cross [788]
with the candle before it.

796 787 with the candle before it. He next does the same before the *ogan,* then before each of the drums in order, continuing to dance before the drums, usually with great violence, while the few "social" dancers who still may be circling about the center pole make way so that he may execute his steps. Gradually his dancing becomes calmed, until he is taken either to the *maison de servitude* or to a near-by house, where he rests and if, as often happens, he has rolled on muddy ground during his possession, washes and changes his clothes.

796 794 787 159 Several examples of the force of this tradition of being "mounted" by the *loa* may be given. One of these which is of especial interest concerns the possession of a man of good education, in the early thirties, who throughout his childhood and early manhood had had no association with the *vodun* cult, but had been encouraged by his family and his own ambition to promote the activities of the Catholic Church. In discussing his earlier experiences and background with one of his intimates, it seemed that on the side of both father and mother many of his relatives were affiliated with the cult, and it was recounted how, at an important ceremony at his ancestral habitation, some years before, he had become possessed. But it was also made clear that he had not been any the less active in the affairs of the Church because of this transient experience, nor had he affiliated himself in any way with any *vodun* group. Why he wished once more to participate in the *vodun* rituals cannot be said; certainly during the weeks immediately preceding his possession he had become interested in the philosophy of *vodun,* and his non-voduistic, if not anti-voduistic background seemed to accentuate his interest in ascertaining the hold of these rites, which had always been presented to him as repellent, on their followers. As an example of the duality of his interest, it may be stated that though he had remarked how "disgusting" it was to roll in the mud when possessed by Damballa, he had also been im-

pressed with the temerity of those who danced in the fire for Legba. 796 794 787 159

At a certain dance, however, he volunteered to help in a small way in promoting the activities of the evening, such as serving *clairin* to the drummers, while he himself danced the social dance about the central post of the *tonnelle*. As the tempo of the dance heightened, he became more deeply imbued with the spirit of the occasion and shouted: " If the *loa* comes to me, I will accept it! " as he plunged again into the circle of dancers. When the drums sounded the salute to the gods, he would awkwardly execute the accompanying backward turning movement of the figure.

After a time he left the *tonnelle*, but before many moments had elapsed a commotion was heard at the near-by *barrière*, where he was reeling in the first stage of possession, just inside the gate, while a fully possessed woman in a figured dress stalked back and forth. An *adjanikon*, with candle and calabash of water, was trying to " settle " his possession, but he fell to the ground and rolled on his back, lying prostrate with legs and arms outstretched and twitching. The *adjanikon*, putting aside the candle and water, lifted his limp body to its [533] feet and then slowly, according to the accepted pattern, holding [539] him upright, swayed with him in time to the song that all twelve or fifteen persons present were by now singing, until, staggering, the possessed man was able to support himself:

Damballa-o, Damballa-e,	Damballa-o, Damballa-e,
Damballa-o, Damballa Wedo,	Damballa-o, Damballa Wedo,
'Gadé ça ou fait' moin.	See what you have done to me.

Steadily fixing his eyes on the possessed one, the *adjanikon* now danced with him, turning always in the opposite direction as he offered him the candle and the water, which, how-

796 794 789 159 ever, the man was not yet able to hold. Moving backwards toward the *maison de servitude*, all the spectators continued to sing the song of Damballa, while the man to whom the god had come half-danced and was half-carried up the path to the *tonnelle* and taken into the family house of worship.

[788] When he had sufficiently recovered to be able to hold the candle and the water, he poured the water and unsteadily bowed three times in the accepted manner before the *couvert sec* to the Rada gods. He now was enough in control of himself to emerge, and, with the *adjanikon* dancing before him with water and a candle, he once again came into the *tonnelle*, before the drums. As he appeared, the drummers stopped the Ogun rhythm they had been sounding, and in an intense silence all waited for the god to announce himself. Half on his knees before the drums, the one possessed began to sing in a cracked voice: [538] [539]

Damballa Wedo,	Damballa Wedo,
Papa m' c'est coulev'-o,	Papa, I am a serpent-o,
Na poi' bois	There is no tree
Moin pa' li monté.	I cannot climb.

With this initial statement, the Damballa rhythm rolled from the drums, as all echoed the song in chorused response, while the possessed figure, in strict conformity to the pattern, first poured water at the central post and then consecutively before the iron and each of the drums. Returning to the central post, he whirled about it, almost but never quite falling, until he could dance before the drums, awkwardly but acceptably, before he disappeared to rest in a near-by house.

796 787 159 793 The explanation offered by this man of the manner in which he became possessed, and his varying attitudes toward his possession, are revealing. On several previous occasions the *hungan* who officiated at the dance had noticed that he was attending *vodun* rites and had joked with him about his interest in them. Once at an earlier dance this *hungan* had

796
787
159
793

given him a piercing glance, not without significance, for as the man, who believed himself the victim of the *hungan's* machinations, said, "Whatever you believe, these *hungans* have some kind of power. . . ." On his arrival at the dance where the possession occurred, the *hungan* had encountered this man sitting alone, some distance from the *tonnelle*. Giving him a drink of liquor, the *hungan*, as he pressed his hand in greeting, sportively turned him about in the manner in which possession is induced. After this the man recollected but little; he did not remember having said he would accept the god, or circling backwards, or bowing to the drums when the "salutes" were played. He dimly remembered having been sent to the *barrière* with some liquor for Bosu, who, not a Rada *loa*, had come unauthorized to one of the spectators and, according to custom, had been removed from the dancing-place. He also just recalled that a woman had become possessed by Legba, but did not know that it was when she touched him that his own possession had begun. The remainder of the night's experience was completely blank, even though the actual state of possession occupied only a small part of it.

Later during the dance, when he had returned, he was heard to say: "It was not a pretty trick that the *hungan* played on me"—a feeling not assuaged when, the next morning at mass, the priest in his sermon preached against following false gods and recounted the miseries in store for those who desert the true faith; nor when he reflected that, by his possession, he had in a sense become affiliated with a group whose position in society was anything but such as to enhance his own social status. The *hungan*, however, promised him that he would not bring on another possession, adding, as an aside: "It is good, though, that a Haitian should have this experience." None the less, to make sure that this *loa bossal* would not come to him at awkward moments, it was going to be necessary for him to baptize it, thus continuing the process which

796
787
159

796 some termed his "Haitianization." There were those who
787 expressed surprise at the occurrence, but the majority held
159 that though this man had himself been a devout follower of the Church, and his parents before him, Damballa was a *loa* of his family, and therefore it was reasonable that it should come to him when called at a dance.

796 Another "unauthorized" possession, that of a woman in
787 mourning, was also witnessed. Like the *service* of one night's
765 duration, which this dance followed, it was but poorly or-
159 ganized and provided for, and in this it reflected the status of the family, which had but few resources, since its head had recently come into the valley and therefore lacked the backing which only his own relationship group could give him. Here there was no *maison de servitude,* and the *tonnelle* had been erected in an open field where the only shelter was offered by a crude hut near by. The *hungan* did not appear until late, while the host lived up to his reputation by drinking more *clairin* than was good for him. None the less, one violent possession by a *loa bossal* occurred relatively early in the evening, though the *loa* concerned did not "announce himself" through the song of the one he had possessed.

The woman in mourning sang continuously as she sat among the spectators, and since she was not supposed to dance, she executed dance movements in place. As the drumming became more and more *chaud* — "hot" — she became correspondingly more excited until, suddenly leaping from her seat, she began a frenzied dance. She refused the water and candle, however, and when finished with her dancing, she fell exhausted into her chair, where she remained in a coma during the next hour. She roused herself later and again joined the singing, but though she was near possession, this never came on. Her *loa,* like the other *loa bossal* that came earlier in the evening, did not "announce itself," and since it was her first — and not unwelcome — possession, she stated that at the termination of her period of mourning she would

have a *hungan* divine its identity so that she might thereafter 796
worship it and be under its protection. As in the other case 787●
discussed, the personality involved here is not without inter- 765
est. 159 The woman was one of the shrewdest traders in the Mirebalais market, and noted for her hardness. Underneath this, however, the presence of much vital energy could be felt as well as a passionate desire for gayety and attention from members of the other sex. That the essential lack of satisfaction of these drives in her life, as discussed and observed, figured in bringing on her possession cannot be doubted, and, as such, throws significant light on the nature of the psychological aspects of the phenomenon.

These instances, however, must not be thought of as a regu- 796
lar part of the ritual of the dances. Though a dance was attended almost every Saturday night during the course of an entire summer, and a number of *services* and other *vodun* rites in addition, these were the only occasions when a *loa bossal* appeared. In order, therefore, to document the pattern of the *vodun* dance that has already been given, some of the dances witnessed may be described in outline.

The first of these is a dance which, originally intended as the culmination of the *service* described in the preceding chapter, failed to fulfill its end because of a quarrel between two important members of the family. None the less, it proved to be one of the most spirited and typical dances witnessed. The habitation, when reached shortly after six o'clock, was deserted, except for a few people who seemed to be waiting disconsolately. Among them were several *hunsi* in white, [794]
and two who carried banners, while the three drums, each [534]
"dressed" in its skirt-like covering, stood before the entrance, the drumsticks and the *ogan* lying on the *barrière* itself. Since the *hungan* had not arrived, one or two of the men present took charge as darkness came on. Before this dance began, it was necessary to introduce the drums ceremonially into the compound, and as this was the first *vodun* dance after the es-

796 A candle was attached to a peg of each drum, which,
[354] with the lantern that hung near the central post, gave unusually good light. However, as possessions began, the candles
● [187] on the drums were extinguished as those possessed fell against them, and no more than one could be kept lighted.

793 With the arrival of the *hungan* at about half past nine, the
776 dancing became even more animated, and Ogun "came" as
539 soon as he took over the *manman* drum, but despite this, the
796 *hungan* continued the ritual invocation to call all the *loa:*

Moin rhelé Papa Legba, St. Jo,	I call Papa Legba, St. Joseph,
Moin rhelé Damballa papa,	I call Papa Damballa,
Moin rhelé Papa Damballa, St. Jo,	I call Papa Damballa, St. Joseph,
Moin rhelé Loko Atinsu, St. Jo.	I call Loko Atinsu, St. Joseph.
La vie nan mains Bon Dieu,	Life is in the hands of God,
Seigneur, moin rhelé Ogun Ferraille, St. Jo.	Master, I call Ogun Ferraille, St. Joseph.
Moin rhelé Damballa Wedo,	I call Damballa Wedo,
Moin rhelé Aida Wedo, Seigneur.	I call Aida Wedo, Master.
La vie nan mains Bon Dieu.	Life is in the hands of God.
Moin rhelé Papa Agasu, St. Jo, Dokwe Agwe,	I call Papa Agasu, St. Joseph, Dokwe Agwe,
Moin rhelé Maît' Ossange,	I call Master Ossange,
Moin rhelé Maît' St. Jean,	I call Master St. John,
Moin rhelé Gran' Siligbo,	I call Gran' Siligbo,
Moin rhelé Agwe Woyo,	I call Agwe Woyo,
Moin rhelé Loa 'Bitation,	I call the *loa* of the habitation,

793
796
[779]
[539]

Moin rhelé Aizan,	I call Aizan,
Moin rhelé Sobo, St. Jo, Dokwe Agwe,	I call Sobo, St. Joseph, Dokwe Agwe,
Moin rhelé Papa Gede,	I call Papa Gede,
Moin rhelé toutes mystères.	I call all the gods.

When he had ended his song a number of the "salutes" were played on the drums, to which all danced backward in circles, ending the figure in bows before the drums, which were rolling out the call. In the course of the evening a large number of gods were summoned, but, as would be expected, only the *loa* of the family came to this ceremony. Possessions were observed for Legba, Damballa, Ogun Balandjo, Ogun Galloné, Ogun Ferraille, Gede, and Kadya Bosu. St. John, Osange, Aizan, Ashadé Bokor, Gran' Bosu, Magie, Jean Pétro, Congo, Guinée, Sobo, Bade, and Agwe Woyo, were the *loa* who refused their summons. Though no deity held the center of the stage for too long a time, the evening was notable because it was marked by an unusually large number of Ogun and Damballa possessions, which seemed constantly to alternate. Damballa being the stronger *loa*, his appearance when Ogun was present necessitated the retirement of the latter; but since the possession of Ogun by one woman was particularly persistent, this god returned again and again. As at a number of dances, the *haut chant* for Ogun Galloné, the French marching-song that salutes the "general," was among the songs heard, when those possessed by the god skipped from one end of the *tonnelle* to the other before the drums.

796
797
[793]

[776]

[533]

One particularly striking Damballa possession came on suddenly. As a tall, strong man was seized by the god, he gave a great shout and grasped the beams of the *tonnelle,* disappearing upward through the thatch. For a moment it did not seem that he had climbed on the roof of the *tonnelle,* until a head and arms which appeared between the palm fronds showed he

796 was there. To bring him down, a *hunsi* holding water and a
787 candle at once began slowly to dance under him, fixing him
[794] with the usual unvarying stare. After some five minutes the candle and water were quickly given to those near by, and in a flash the possessed one was safely on the ground, candle in hand, pouring water before the center pole and the drums, and dancing magnificently.

796 Shortly after midnight the head of the family and his wife
793 returned to the scene of the dance, the explanation given for
787 this return revealing the native conception of the power of
593 the *hungan*. Before his arrival, it was said he had been told of the quarrel; hence on his way to the dance he passed the *barrière* of the house of the family head, though he did not stop to speak with him. Prior to leaving his home, however, he was supposed to have performed a rite which, soon after he began drumming at the dance, so affected the children of the family head that they became possessed and at once ran to the *tonnelle*. Since their children were present, the father and mother were forced to come, and this was followed by a reconciliation of those who had quarreled. To make doubly sure that the *loa* would take no offense, however, another dance which formally ended the *service* was given jointly by all members of the family several weeks later.

796 One phase of the ceremonial always encountered, but un-
787 usually frequent on this occasion, was the salutation of the assembled company by the *loa*. One woman, possessed by Ogun, greeted all present first by shaking hands with wrists crossed in the customary manner, and then kissing each person on both cheeks. Another, possessed by Ossange, took the neckerchief from about his neck and wiped the faces of all those present, paying particular attention to the drummers. The son of the family head was again possessed by Gede as at the *service*, and his greeting to the assembled company was especially dramatic. His possession took the form of a hysteri-

cal, rapid, continuous jumping, with the body held rigid. As he bobbed up and down, holding his candle under his chin so that the light distorted his features and emphasized the vacant stare in his eyes, he monotonously repeated the sharp sounds of his god: "*Ke-ke-ke-ke-ke-ke-ke!*" or "*Hoi! Hoi! Hoi!*" Standing before some, he would greet them by taking their crossed hands in his strong grip and bringing them down in a single movement that shook the entire body. Once he removed the red kerchief he wore, extending it as an indication he wished gifts of money; he used it to wipe the perspiration from the faces of others; while he would merely run his hands through the hair of still others.[*] 796 787

As daybreak neared, the crowd thinned, so that by half past five few of the good drummers or important men remained. Persons who had been sleeping roused themselves, and there was a general exodus. Most of those who had been at the dance did not go to sleep, however, for early Sunday morning mass an hour later found them at the church saying their prayers and listening to the sermon of the priest. 796

In contrast, another dance visited was noteworthy for its many and varied possessions. It was held at the habitation of one of the fathers-in-law of a *hungan*, and began somewhat later, the drums not arriving until almost eight o'clock. Only a minor ceremony was necessary to bring them through this gateway. The host three times poured water inside the gate, while three men played on the drums and a fourth tapped the *ogan* for a moment. The proceedings began when an elderly *hunsi* summoned Legba, invoking in her song Siligbo Vavou, Dahomey, Ogun, Bade, and "all *loa*." The *hungan* who was host himself arrived at nine o'clock, and the excellence of his drumming caused one possession to follow another with great rapidity. The dance was a large one, and by midnight there were at least two hundred persons in attendance, while at one time fifty or more were dancing about the central post and as many as seven or eight were possessed at once. 796 787 [533]

000
796
787
776

many as seven or eight were possessed at once. During the night of this dance the following thirty-one *loa* "came" in the order named:

Ossange Damballa Wedo
Sobo
Bumba
Congo
Si Adaman
Simbi Djo
Agasu Ténèré
Damballa
Odansil Yewe
Ogun Ferraille
Bosu Trois Cornes
Bosu d'l'eau
Simbi (nan d'l'eau)
Damballa Wedo
Simbi Kita
Papa Loko Dahomey
Ogun Batala
Ogun Batagri
Ogun Balandjo
Ogun Shango
Mait' Ogun
Ogun Ferraille
Ogun Ashadé
Ibo Lélé
Ossange
Agau (Mait' Woyo)
Mait' Aizan
Shango
Damballa
Simbi en Deux Eaux
Bosu

The only deity that was called but failed to respond was Gran' Bra. And it is to be noted that both Rada and Pétro gods "came" in response to the summons, though *loa* of the two categories were not present under the *tonnelle* at the same time. Each person possessed was looked after very carefully, women's ear-rings being taken off so that they would not be lost, the contents of men's pockets being emptied, and knives always being removed from their sheaths. When one man was violently possessed by Papa Loko Dahomey and danced "strongly," attempts were made to wrest from him the walking-stick he carried. They were not successful, however, and all dodged him as he brandished it. The *hungan* host was always present to take the possessed one inside the house which formed one side of the *tonnelle*, to "treat" him.

A number of comments on the possessions by several of the

gods may be made. Si Adaman, known as a *loa* Dominicaine, 787
possessed a woman who, with another possessed by Sobo, came 776
to greet the white visitors and ask for *kola*, a non-alcoholic 776
drink much desired by Rada gods. The woman possessed by Agasu Tèmèré was also at one time or another during this dance "mounted" by ten other *loa*. On one occasion, when possessed by this Rada deity, she went to the *barrière* because under the *tonnelle* they were dancing for Simbi — "who is not of my family." Asking another dancer to whom Sobo had come to accompany her, she sang "Saddle and bridle my mount for me," and "Sobo goes with Agasu; he stays in my house." Historically this is significant, since Agasu is the deified ancestor of the royal Dahomean sib, and Sobo the Dahomean god of thunder.

Bosu Trois Cornes came violently to a young girl dressed in red. She was taken inside the house against which the *tonnelle* had been erected, and while a number of men held her, the *hungan* worked over her. She was in a dangerous state, for Ti Kita Demembré, who is much feared, often goes with Bosu, and in this instance of what was said to be a first possession was believed to be "not far away" because of the rigidity with which the arms of the girl were held, in positions almost to dislocate them. The *hungan* scolded the *loa* — "Be off! You are not wanted here!" After the girl had been brought far enough through her possession to pour water and take a candle before the drums, she was sent home, carefully attended. It was held absolutely essential that there be no delay before baptizing her *loa* and sending away its harmful companions; otherwise, when possession next occurred, she might do harm to herself.

Early in the morning one of the several visiting *hungans* 776
became possessed by Damballa, and, imitating the serpent, 787
climbed through the roof of the *tonnelle*. The priest who was host, after bringing him down, danced with him, carrying his guest, still possessed, about the dancing-space on his back as

796
787

a great outcry of acclamation was heard from those present. Afterwards the visitor, always under the influence of his god, greeted everyone with the crossed-arm handshake of the *loa*,* and ended by dancing opposite the young woman to whom so many gods came — now possessed by still another deity.

796
546

This dance offered an especially striking demonstration of the hold of the Church on the people of Mirebalais. Feeling that motion pictures of an actual *vodun* dance should be made available so that the real nature of the ceremony could be demonstrated and comparisons made between the Haitian and Dahomean practices of which his visitors had told him, the *hungan* himself made all effort to continue the dance until the morning light would permit pictures to be taken; as an inducement to remain, additional *clairin* and biscuits were provided. As daylight approached, however, on one of the few mornings when no early fog obscured the light, the participants began to slip away, so that by sunrise only the usual fifteen or twenty young folk shuffling about the central post were to be seen. Later, in the village, the procession held the first Sunday of each month before the principal mass of the day passed through the square. Many of those who, as dancers or possessed ones, had been active in this *vodun* dance could be seen in it; while next to the priest himself marched the woman who had been possessed by her eleven *vodun* gods during the night just ended.

twins and the dead make a single chapter for us." This point 171
of view is supported by a study of the twin cult as found in that 174
part of West Africa from which so much of Haitian culture 776
came, where a single category of the supernatural world, comprising 769
all ancestors, includes both twins and the dead, as 845
well as all others "who have passed through the womb of a woman." As might be expected, the concept is more elaborated in West Africa than in Haiti; but the important point is that in Haiti, though less explicitly formulated, it has persisted.

To worship twins it is not necessary either for a family to 845
number them among its members of this generation, or to 769
have included them within the memory of those living, for it is sufficient if a tradition exists that twins had once been born to some member of the family. If the twins are alive or lived in recent times, sacrifices are given both at Christmas and at harvest time; otherwise only at Christmas. Some families, indeed, worship twins because a *hungan* has divined that their unknown ancestors in "Guinée" had included them. There are still others who decide to worship the *marassa* without the advice of a diviner, because certain benefits are believed to come to those who worship twins, because of their power for good or evil.[1]

The source of this power is vague; one characteristic answer 845
to a question concerning it was: "Their power comes
from God. Do we ourselves know how twins are made?" It [776]
is agreed, however, that St. Nicholas is their spiritual father [773]
—an opinion based on the tale of this saint, held to have been a sorcerer who, in very early times, killed three *marassa* (the twins themselves and the *dossu*, or child after twins) and salted them away in a barrel. The mother of the children came to him to offer up her prayers, and, touched by her sorrow, he resuscitated them, since when he has been their "father." The power of twins, whatever its source, is very real to the Hai-
tians. They are believed to be able to predict rain, for ex- [787]

845 ample, long before ordinary folk.[2] If promised offerings in the
● [illegible] event of an ample harvest, their aid in bringing about this
782 desired end is even more fruitful than that of the *loa* or the
769 dead, who are therefore appealed to only indirectly.

Twins, however, are capricious beings, ready to do harm
if they are not humored. Consequently, twins must be given
anything they ask for, and it is especially important to provide
them with the clothes they covet, when giving a *mangé*
153 *marassa*. If their father fails to provide these new clothes, they
will *kembé* (seize) him, and he may at once have an attack of
fever or a bad toothache or earache; or, more likely still, he
will be seriously constipated, since this is the punishment
particularly favored by the *marassa*, just as the *loa* most fre-
845 quently send dysentery, and the dead cause headaches. If lack
[illegible] of resources makes it impossible to provide what they demand,
828 a painstaking explanation must be given them or they will
drive a person mad in the manner recounted in the following
marassa myth:

> There were once twins, one good and one evil. They were working a field with another brother, but the evil one refused to help. The other two, therefore, said they would not give him any food. Because of this the evil twin drove the third brother insane. After they had long prayed that he reconsider, he finally agreed to restore sanity to his brother, but insisted on inflicting deafness as a punishment, so that this brother was deaf until he died.

845 At the birth of twins, special "twin plates" are provided
778 when their birth is announced to the *loa* — either before or
769 after their Church baptism — where offerings to the spirits of
twins are placed. Usually paired, the plates may be three in
number, in which case the third is for the *dosu*, the child born
after twins, who is believed to be even more powerful than
twins themselves and is thus an important figure in the cult.

dead must first count them, he can never accomplish this before 764 daylight. 775 From these precautions, it is evident that for the Haitian the reality of existence after death is no fictional [754] one, as is even more vividly illustrated in the answer given to [824] the question whether or not a flute, such as young boys play, would be placed in the coffin of a lad: " What! And have the dead going about all the time blowing it? "

When dressed, the body is placed on a mat or mattress or 764 in a hammock and covered with a clean cloth. A *bande de machoire,* which goes under the chin and over the head to hold the jaw in place, in earlier days, as today in remote sections of the valley, served the double purpose of making possible the identification of a ghost as such, and of keeping the moisture inside the mouth. At present, however, it is usually removed when the body is placed in the coffin. In earlier times also, as today among the peasants in the hills, the nostrils and ears were plugged with cotton. The body and head are shaved [302] of all hair, and the finger- and toe-nails clipped; hair and clippings are later placed in the coffin and buried with the body. The eyes usually close naturally; it is a bad sign if they do not, [826] indicating, as it does, that magic has caused death. Putrefaction, [787] or any unusual sign connected with death such as when [754] a cadaver swells, or a body remains warm and perspires, or, as mentioned, when the eyes remain open, is held to be an indication that the soul has been taken by a sorcerer and the person "sold"—all signalling a "bad" death and requiring that a dagger be struck into the body and burial take place immediately.

Some time later, the *prêt' savanne* comes to read prayers if [793] the death has occurred in the countryside, or the priest of the local Catholic church if in the town or near it. After the prayers have been said and relatives and friends have addressed the dead and "given him commissions," such as " Say good-day to my mother," " Ask my father to help us, for the weather has been bad this year for the crops . . ." the body is older relatives participate in the rites as at any death; moreover, the rule *gran' moun pas sui' 'ti moun* holds only where a father, mother, grandparent, or older sister or brother is concerned.* 766

Unless the dead was known to be a sorcerer his house is not abandoned. If, unlike most of his kind, a reputed sorcerer is survived by children, they continue to live in his house, and though no gesture of marked social disapprobation is made, few persons attend the funeral and fewer still put foot inside the house afterwards, which means there is little of the habitual calling on the survivors. An abandoned house of this type is called *caille yun moun lou' gawou* — the house of a werewolf. If a stranger were to buy such a house, he would first have to "restrain" the evil spirits who continued there. Generally, however, a man will not buy land unless a diviner ascertains that no evil beings have ever been associated with it. 76 [925] [787]●

Such, in outline, are the principal rites for the dead and the outer manifestations of the sanctions which validate the cult for its followers. Fundamentally, these derive from the power which the dead wield in the world of the living — power that is held to come directly from God, who has not only given the dead all the rights of the living, but also the right to return to earth as ghosts. There are several types of dead, two of these being the *vien-viens* and the *zombi*. The *vien-viens* are ordinary ghosts; the latter, who will be discussed in the next chapter, are those whose souls have been "sold" by sorcerers and are therefore doomed to wander the earth until their destined time arrives to return to God. Still another type of dead are the ghosts of children who die before baptism, called *lutins*, who ride young horses, so that when a wild colt with a tangled mane is seen, it is said that a *lutin* has been on his back. The souls of the dead are held first to go to God in the sky, where they are condemned to purgatory or hell or permitted to remain in paradise; "It is God who creates, therefore when someone dies, he returns to Him." And as for the effect of pur- 775

775 gatory on those who are possessed by *loa* who go unharmed in fire, it is said: " It is the *loa* that go into the fire. The soul is another thing."

All agree that the dead do not possess folk in the manner of the *loa,* as might be expected from the fact that the most important rituals in the cult of the dead are not only dominated by the Church, but carried out by its priest. In the matter of consulting the dead when questions of importance for the family are involved, however, there is no consensus of opinion. The most widespread point of view holds that only those dead whose *loa* have not been removed from their heads can be summoned, and that this is done only to permit them to " go to God," so their souls may be at rest. Otherwise, " when the dead are called, it is a matter of magic, for the dead are never good and one always must fear them." And though a
● 787 775 Maît' 'Bitation that is an old, old ancestor may " mount the head " of a member of the family, he would never be specially called and in most cases, if he did come, would be " re-
[669] strained." On the other hand, it was recounted how during the Caco rebellion the soul of Dessalines was brought into a jar and asked for his counsel. It is said, however, that he was so angered at the consistent defeats sustained by the Haitians that he struck everyone to earth and roundly scolded them for having lost the liberty with which he endowed them, departing without giving the desired advice. And since the spirits of Christophe and Toussaint are believed to be even stronger, no one had sufficient courage to summon them!

765 The immediate nature of the relation between the dead and the living is best seen in the conventions and attitudes surrounding the wearing of mourning, which is required of all children of the deceased, whether " legitimate " or other-
[822] wise. Black is worn twelve months for a father, eighteen months for a mother; and half-mourning — black and white — is worn for a sister, brother, cousin, uncle, or aunt. In the country, before full mourning is put on, the black cloth is

taken to the *pret' savanne* to be blessed with holy water; in the 765
town the Catholic priest is said to do this. In full mourning,
black is worn on Sundays, Mondays, and Fridays, the days sacred to the dead, but since full mourning means that one must
be dressed in one's best and it is impossible to wear these
clothes all day long even in the first weeks after death, the rule
is to remain at home, fully dressed, on Sundays, Mondays, and
Fridays, wearing the full mourning outside the house only to
Sunday mass.

When full mourning for a parent cannot be worn immedi- 765
ately following death, the fulfillment of the obligation is post- 775
poned. If this duty is not ultimately met, however, the dead 784
take vengeance, so that a child of the one who was remiss per-
haps falls ill, or some other misfortune comes to him. If the
negligent one is no longer living, then the penalty for his neg- [787]
lect will be assessed on his children, who, on consulting a
diviner, will be told that they must wear mourning not only
for their own parents, but for their grandparents as well. Such
is the case of a dying woman whose story is recounted, for a [755]
diviner ascertained that though she had worn mourning for
her own father, he had not worn it for his parent; as soon as she
put on full mourning for her grandfather, she is said to have
immediately recovered.

A widower wears mourning for a legally married wife for 765
a year, and a widow for her husband during a similar period, 587
and it is believed that if a man were to remarry before the year
has elapsed, his second wife would die, so that a woman will
not go sooner to a widower, while it is equally dangerous for
a widow to take a husband before the first anniversary of the
death of her spouse. Should a *placée* wife die, however, an- [583]
other may be taken in her stead before the year has passed, for
it is only in matters where the Church is concerned that the
dead take vengeance. Furthermore, a man who has more than [595]
one mate may go to his other wives at any time after the death
of a spouse, and though he would, of course, not go to them

789 [888] person of great experience was pointed out who was believed able to stop a runaway horse without putting a finger on him. One widely spread type of charm is an *arrêt* against the *mal jòk,* or evil eye. Mention has been made of protective charms when the measures taken to guard growing crops were discussed, and also in connection with safeguarding the well-being of infants. The power in this latter type of *garde* often is made to reside in a seed on a string or chain, or a cross of beads sewed on cloth, to represent the four corners of the earth.

789 793 Because charms are the outer symbols of magic, detailed examples of their making will give insight into the nature of charms in general. The first of these which may be described [827] [787] [754] was a *garde,* made by a *mambu,* to relieve a pregnant woman whose milk had begun to flow before the birth of her child — a sign that an evil spirit had been sent her by an enemy, and that her delivery would therefore be fraught with danger. [787] During the séance the *mambu* was continuously possessed by her god, Ogun, whose identity was shown by her whistling. Before the *mambu* as she commenced her incantation were some *clairin,* lighted red candles, a new piece of soap, incense, sulphur, garlic, light brown shoemaker's thread, an empty bottle, a bottle filled with a green, evil-smelling lotion called *baigne de mambu,* a chick, and three iron nails. As she tied the cord in knots she muttered her spell; then, taking the empty bottle, she put in it a bit of the incense, sulphur, garlic, some soap, some *clairin,* and some *baigne de mambu.* With the knotted cord she tied a cross made of two nails to the neck of the bottle, repeating her formula before she put it down. Instructing the pregnant woman to take the bottle, she said: " Speak into it and say everything you wish."

[825] She then took the chick, opened its beak, and wrote on it with a pencil, continuing the incantation the while. With the pencil she also made marks on the thighs, the wings, the upper joints, and the leg joints before she handed it to her client

term *loup-garou,* or werewolf. From Africa has come the con- 754
cept of the *baka,* though this he has merged with that of the 776
démon, and all operate through the power of Lucifer and the 177
Devil, conceived as two separate beings. In addition, as will be [775]
seen, the cult of the dead also contributes to this system, since the *loa* who rule the cemeteries are indispensable for the practice of magic, as it bears especially on the concept of *zombi,* concerning which so much has been made in recent years.

The evil *loups-garous* are women whose real nature is re- [826]
vealed by their red eyes, though some hold that they have a black spot in the corner of the eye. Another word less frequently heard to designate the *loup-garou* is the Dahomean term *azeto,* employed in Africa for witches and vampires, a concept which in Haiti has become merged with that of the werewolf.[8] The *loup-garou,* with her male counterpart, the *démon,* is empowered by the *bocor.* As might be expected, she 789
is greatly feared, and should an old woman suspected of being 754
one of them come to a house, someone will see to it that in an 776
adjoining room two brooms are crossed as the woman's name is pronounced three times, so that if she is actually a *loup-garou,* she cannot escape.[9] Children in particular carry counter-charms both against these women and against demons; one such, for a woman with child, has been mentioned in an earlier chapter,[10] and the making of another *garde* of this type has just been described. With a charm of this kind "you can leave at midnight for Port-au-Prince [instead of waiting for dawn] and fear nothing. You may meet a band of horned demons carrying candles in their hands, but they will stand aside and let you pass."

In Mirebalais, *baka* are usually mentioned when these evil 776
beings are discussed, particularly since it is in connection with 787 ●
them that the term *engagement* is most often heard. An en- 754
gagement, which is more feared than a *wanga,* the word usually encountered in the literature when evil magic is under discussion, designates a pledge made by a person, usually to

776 " give " a collateral member of his own family to an evil spirit
●787 in return for some important gain to himself. The spirit, how-
754 ever, is insatiable, and never rests content with a single victim. Thus it happens that when one member of a family dies and then another, and another, the *hungans* who are consulted declare such an *engagement* to exist. As soon as this is revealed, all other members take steps to safeguard their houses spiritually — perhaps in the manner of those whose *service* was described in an earlier chapter, which, it will be remembered, was motivated by just such a discovery. Unfailingly, however, the *baka* is there at the appointed hour, clamoring for his due, and proceeds to satisfy himself by turning upon the one who has made the *engagement*, killing his own wife and children, and finally himself.

Why, knowing this, do people enter into such compacts? The answer is usually a shrug of the shoulders, or the statement that human beings are at times driven to such desperation that nothing will restrain them. " A man may even pledge half his own life." Often the reason for such a compact is a craving to advance the status of his children, and that is why when a man who has been consistently unfortunate in worldly matters suddenly becomes affluent, gossip of an *engagement* is heard. But such wealth, it is believed, " passes like the wind."

There are several types of *baka*.[11] Some go about " devouring " men — the term *mangé moun*, in Haiti as in Africa, is idiomatic for sending fatal illness or bringing about an accidental death — while others, who stay in the house of their master, go forth only to procure him riches. These latter are jealous spirits and " make their conditions " — which means that they will ultimately destroy the members of their master's family, particularly his children, or, should a man repent of his bargain and dismiss them, they will return to kill him. To bring wealth to their master, they rob others. Some believe that *baka* are *loa* who change into these creatures from time to time, or are animals given power as *baka* by these *loa*. The "squad" of the *baka* includes the following: 776 787 754

'Ti Kita Demembré
'Ti Jean Pié Sèche
Erzilie Gé Rouge
Simbi Proméné
Simbi en Deux Eaux
Simbi Troi' Z'ilé

Baka appear as small bearded human-like figures with flaming eyes, or as cattle, horses, asses, goats, bears(?), and dogs. Sheep never become *baka* because the sheep, as represented on the chromolithographs, is the animal of the Virgin and therefore cannot be a creature of evil. The mule also is never a *baka* for reasons given in the myth explaining how it came to be accursed. 776 825

[773]

> One day Jesus came down a path astride a mule. When he came to a crossroads a snake so frightened the mule that he reared on his hind legs, throwing Jesus to the ground. Jesus became angry and cursed him, saying that from that day onward mules would never bear offspring. He also cursed the snake, saying that thereafter it must forever go about on its belly.

Whether because of this or because of its long, alert ears, the mule is favored for night travel, for this animal is held able to sense these creatures of evil and give his rider warning of them. A black cat can become a *baka*, but there are also good black cats that drive away evil spirits. Even if a black cat-*baka* is sent away, nothing happens to its owner.

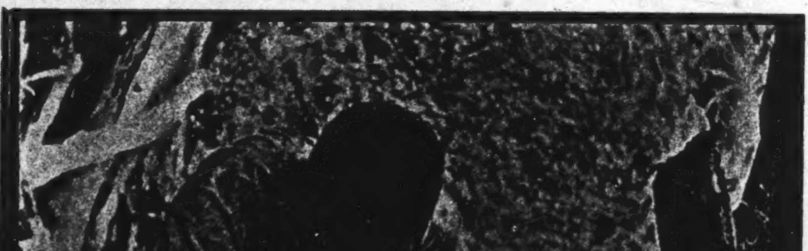
A *baka* named Babako, sometimes called Bakuba Baka, is believed to live in the *mapou* tree, where he is "fed" in December. "He is the chief of [evil] magic, is magic itself," it is said, and "*C'est baggai diabolique, gros baka* — he is a thing of the Devil, a great *baka*." For this reason the *mapou* tree is greatly feared, and that is why those who "serve" the gods of the *mapou* do it in secret and are dealt with circumspectly. 776 824

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
Mirebalais

291
787
794
796

ABOVE, *At a* vodun *dance: those possessed whirling about the central post.*
BELOW, *Making the* vodun *drum: describing the sign of the cross with lighted candles over the unheaded bodies.*

534
788
291



[facing p. 244]

754

with it, or the body is made to lie face downwards in the coffin, 764
since the discomfort of this position causes the spirit of the 775
dead to avenge itself on the sorcerer who caused the death. [789]
When a man has been killed by magic, his surviving relatives 754
go to a *hungan* or a *bocor* to discover the culprit. The names of 787
those suspected of the deed are called. Before the diviner
stands a pottery jar filled with magically treated water. When
the unwilling image of the guilty one finally appears, the *hungan*
plunges his knife into it, and as the water turns red, those
watching know that when the specified number of days have
passed, the guilty one will be dead.[12] Should a suspect be innocent,
the image of the Virgin Mary or of St. John is sometimes
seen when he is called; but if one known to be guilty does not
appear, it is proof that his magic is stronger than that used to
call him. Recourse is then had to a powerful *wanga*, or poison,
or to the spirit of someone dead, an *âme abandonée* who has [775]
led a life of evil and himself been a murderer. "They would
certainly not send the spirit of the one just killed. He is too
green" — to bring death to the killer. If none of these measures
prevail, no further acts of revenge are attempted against
the suspect, the feeling being that he has supplied himself with
too powerful magic to allow effective revenge to be taken.

On occasion, an apparent death is felt not to be a real death, 754
but rather the simulacre of death brought about by the machination 761
of a sorcerer. The corpse is thereupon given poison 764
or stabbed with a dagger, to make certain that an apparent 775
death becomes an actual one, but the person who stabs the
body must stand behind it in order that the corpse as slave of
the sorcerer may not reveal who had stabbed him when summoned,
and thus make of the one who had robbed him of his
prey a substitute victim. If poison has not been administered [263]
to the corpse, or if the body was not stabbed, after the funeral
the sorcerer recovers the body, which, deprived of its soul,
works for him as a *zombi*, only returning to the grave when
the time decreed by God for his natural death is reached, or if
he is accidentally fed salt.

754 been made to kill through the use of black magic, Gede re-
776 fuses to "dig the grave," no matter what measures the *bocor*
may take. In such a case the victim may be desperately ill, but
787 will not die. When a *hungan* divines the cause, offerings are
782 made to Gede for having saved him from the *magie* of Baron.
For, in the final analysis, "if Gede is in accord with Baron,
death can come, but if the two are not in accord, the man
against whom a *wanga* has been sent will only suffer."

makes for deification of the family dead, but constitutes the 776 171
oldest ancestor of a relationship group one of the great gods 178
and thus causes families to give primary allegiance to a re- 424
stricted number of deities. The most striking aspect of this 769
tradition preserved in Haiti is that all ceremonies must be 781
given by family groups, and at them only members of the fam- 796 171
ily may with propriety become possessed. Possession itself, and 178
the elements which constitute the possession complex — the 53
use of the drums, the rhythms associated with particular gods,
the importance of songs in calling the spirits, the mode of
worship through specific dances for specific deities — these
make up another series of Africanisms. In the dance itself the
use of iron to sound basic rhythms for the drums, the outer
form and function of the rattle, and the fact that the circle of
participants always rotates in a counter-clockwise direction,
are equally African. The modes of behavior to be observed as
possession comes on and the psychological release that follows
it both derive from the same source, as do the beliefs that rit-
uals must be held on the days sacred to the particular god
being worshipped.

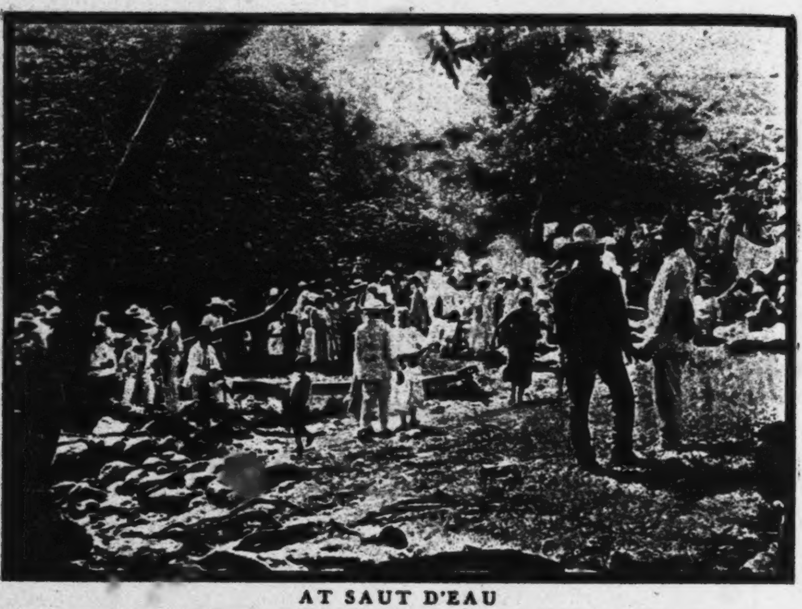
Another retention of African tradition is a belief in the im- 171
portance of sacrifice. It will be remembered that it is held to 178
be more essential to " feed " the gods than to dance for them. 782
This is also the tradition of all peoples of the region from
which the slaves were derived, and in a sense reflects the very
immediate relationship that obtains between Africans, or
Haitians, and their gods. Since in both regions each deity per-
forms the double role of doing good for those who worship
it properly and harassing those who neglect it, the importance
of giving adequate sacrifices to avert evil is evident. In both
Haiti and Africa, however, these may differ with the wealth of
the individual giving the offering, with the number of persons
who contribute toward the ceremony where offerings are
given, or with the seriousness of the situation which the deity
is being asked to remedy. That the gods permit such varia-

> 177 776 534 overturn his memory, overturn his thought, overturn his house, overturn for me my enemies visible and invisible; cause the thunder and the tempest to break them into pieces. And in honor of St. Bouleversé, three Paters and three Ave Marias. . . .[8]

771 179 796 Thus it is seen how Catholicism invades the beliefs and rites of the *vodun* cult. In an analogous fashion *vodun* has not failed to make itself felt in certain festivals of the Church,[9] for while elements of *vodun*, rigidly suppressed inside the Catholic churches, are absent except in so far as they can be carried on surreptitiously, they are nevertheless integral parts of these fêtes in the minds of the folk who make pilgrimages to them. So arresting is the resulting mingling of practices, and so significant for the amalgamation of cultures that has taken place in Haïti, that a detailed discussion will be given of the most prominent instance of this type, the festival in honor of the Virgin of the Palms, which takes place each year on July fifteenth at Ville-Bonheur, or, as it is better known, at Saut d'Eau. The festival of 1926 has been described by Price-Mars;[10] here certain observations made during the fête of 1934 may be given, especially as they have to do with those aspects of the mythology which validate the festival, and as they illustrate the non-Catholic, voduistic phases of the celebration, of importance for the points being considered in this chapter.

778 179 787 [776] [538] Beside the church, Ville-Bonheur has three especially sacred spots, St. John, En bas Palmes, and Saut d'Eau — the falls themselves. At St. John is a large *campêche* tree surrounded by many palms, from beneath which flow streams of water. St. John is said to have appeared here, carrying his scepter as in the chromolithographs, and at that time water began to flow in the sacred springs, and except for one short period has continued ever since as holy water, being used for drinking and bathing, but never for purposes of cooking. The priests

796
291



AT SAUT D'EAU

ABOVE, *Large crowds of worshippers drawn by this fête of the Church.*

BELOW, *Possession coming on as a vodun deity "mounts the head" of a devotee who, climbing a tree, exhorts those gathered to hear him.*

796
787
291

[facing P. 283]

stationed near by did not at first believe in this miracle, until 778
after several appearances of the saint the higher authorities 177
of the Church gave the fête their sanction. Many tales are re- 787
counted of skeptics who, though coming to scoff, became filled with awe when they put foot in the holy place and — significantly for the merging of the two religions — were possessed by *loa* for the first time. A church which has since burned and a small chapel were erected at the site which now is the entrance to the enclosure before the present church. This is the old calvary enlarged, and here the statue of the Virgin, saved when the earlier church burned, is found. Next to this church are the uncompleted walls of the structure which is to be a new and larger church. It is said, however, that this edifice has given much trouble, for each time the walls reach a certain height they fall. The people say: " The Virgin does not like this place," and believe that a simpler church should be built where the old one stood.

The vision of the Virgin at En bas Palmes is believed to 778
have occurred several times, most recently as placed by a lively 173
tradition in the days of the American Marine occupation, 177
when a priest is said to have caused both St. John and En bas 787
Palmes to be closed for several years because, as at present, 776
many who prayed at the church also took occasion to worship their *loa*.

> During the fête, however, the tale goes, the Virgin appeared on a palm tree. The people, on their knees worshipping, sent to the priest to come and pray. He declared it merely superstition, however, and called an American Marine captain stationed at Mirebalais to help him suppress this worship. The captain ordered a Haitian sergeant to shoot the vision, but the Virgin merely moved to another tree; another shot, and she moved again. They cut down the tree, and those who looked on with terror saw the vision slowly ascend to the sky. As the priest

778 turned to leave, word came that his house had burned
776 and nothing in it was saved. Later he suffered a paralytic
173 stroke from which he never recovered. Some say that the
177 American captain became ill and was sent to the States
"as a punishment for what he had done." Several days
● 787 later the sergeant was found mad, wandering in the woods. Since he had fired under orders, however, his punishment was but temporary, and on being cured he returned to Ville-Bonheur to ask pardon of the Virgin. Today he lives in Mirebalais. When they saw the American ill, the priest paralyzed, the sergeant mad, and the presbytery burned, "public clamor" became so strong that both St. John and En bas Palmes were reopened.[11]

778 In 1932 a cyclone at St. John tore down trees and houses and
731 hurt but did not kill the worshippers who had gathered there.
177 An eyewitness insisted he had seen the enormous whirling cloud rise from the sacred place. He had no time to reach his house, for with a noise like a cannon-shot the whirlwind came, and an enormous oak tree fell just behind him — "I saw death staring at me." Today he carries two scapularies to the Virgin to protect him.

778 The third sacred spot is at the falls themselves, where the
796 grandeur and beauty of the scene is such as to induce the re-
787 ligious thrill almost unaided, and where great numbers go in
177 the course of their pilgrimage to Ville-Bonheur. There are
[788] two falls, situated at a distance of several miles from the village, one for Damballa and one for Aida Wedo, and it is believed that those who bathe in the sacred streams become possessed. It is said that the palms near by are sacred to the Virgin, but others hold that they are for Damballa. Many visit the falls on the day preceding the fête, but the largest throng hurries there immediately after the principal mass, when the greatest number of possessions and the most violent
[illegible] seizures by the *loa* occur. The falls, therefore, in association

the falls, therefore, in association with the purely Catholic rituals carried on at the village church, are seen to hold an important if unofficial place in the complex of rites known in the Haitian Church calendar as the Fête of Saut d'Eau. 778 796 177

During the two or three days preceding the fête and on the fifteenth of July itself, an air of great gayety not unlike the carnival spirit accompanying European Church festivals pervades the surrounding country. Camions traverse the almost impassable side road, bringing crowds of people from Port-au-Prince, from the Dominican border, and even from the north, who throng the streets and the shrines and tramp the miles from the village to the waterfalls or visit the nearer sacred sites of St. John's Wood and En bas Palmes, to light candles and ask the satisfaction of their needs. Like the falls themselves, these spots by their very beauty awaken a sense of emotional awareness, and it is not strange that here, as at the falls, many possessions occur. At night, in particular, the great trees with their interlacing serpent-like roots, the gaping earth which at En bas Palmes is witness to the uprooting of the palm trees where the miracle occurred, and the stream of sacred water, all make a scene of indescribable eeriness, heightened by the flickering candles given as offerings, and the open lamps of those who stay the night here to fulfill their vows. 778 796 78 177 (894)

In the town itself gambling and other games go on, and dances of all kinds are held at night, among them *vodun* and *bal,* though at these public dances no possessions are countenanced. One of the most colorful aspects of the scene is the *penitants,* wearing clothing of varied colors in fulfillment of a request by the *loa* they worship or an obligation to them. Such folk are not permitted in church unless the clothing which marks them is covered by ordinary dress, but they walk the streets, often possessed and often using their power to heal those whom they encounter. Possessions by Ogun, by Gede, by Baron Samedi, by Damballa, by Erzilie and other *vodun* deities were observed, particularly at the shrines, where their devotees prophesied and healed the sick. 796 781 177 524 526 535 782 292 755

776 823 it joins the flooded Artibonite as its master accompanies Clairmé on his way to consult with the great ruler of the sea, Agwe. Actually, at the height of the rainy season the force of the light colored muddy water of the major stream holds back the darker colored flow of its tributaries in a manner which accords with the legend, so that, observing the Tombe River at one such time, the Haitians who were present said: "The Tombe is waiting for its master to pass."

776 [184] [794] Gede, a deity who figures in both the Rada and the Pétro groups as chief functionary under Baron Samedi, ruler of cemeteries, is tolerated rather than favored, though his rewards to his devotees include the refusal to dig a premature [781] grave for them. When Gede possesses a devotee at a dance, Damballa, Ogun, and the other Rada gods "leave" at once, and those who are possessed by them come out of their possessions. For though Gede is no less a *loa* than other gods, "He is a *zombi* and is fed apart"; as the Haitians say: "The *loa* [822] are like human beings. They will not mingle with the dead, and Gede is of the dead." His color is black, and Saturday [782] is his sacred day. He "eats" salt herring, hot peppers, cassava, roasted corn, roasted bananas, and other roasted foods. He [825] drinks *clairin* — much of it — and at great ceremonies a black goat and chickens are killed for him, as well as those chickens with ruffled feathers called *djakati*, which in all the New World, as in Africa, are believed to discover and dig up magic charms set against their owners. He lives in the cemetery, "behind the cross." There are a number of deities whose names are compounded with the name of Gede — Gedenibo, Gedeonsu, Gedehun — and hence the question whether or not this is a generic term or a specific designation is pertinent. There is no agreement on this point, and it could only be established that those *loa* who bear the same name, such as all Ogun or Bosu or Simbi deities, are brothers; but who the parents of these groups may have been is not known.

Associated with Simbi and Gede in the Pétro "squad" are

[771] heard in Haiti, but descriptive details of the practice abound." Elsewhere (p. 158) she speaks of "this higglety pigglety pantheon" of *loa*, whose traits "none . . . [were] . . . able to describe . . . at all systematically." [776] Price-Mars (I), 52, however, mentions the existence of a theology based on African beliefs not unlike that described here.

[9] Cf. Parsons (I), 168.

[10] Nowhere is the confusion with which writers on Haiti have approached and presented *vodun* theological concepts better exemplified than in the passage found in Craige, 98–9; or 71, where a [114] charm for working evil magic is spoken of as "something having to do with voodoo."

[11] Despite the importance of possession, one would hesitate before accepting in its entirety the somewhat simplistic approach of Dorsainvil that "*le vôdou se ramène à l'idée de la possession,*" (I), 115.

[12] St. Mery, i, 55.

[13] [788] [787] Parsons (I), 169, note 2, speaks of baptism, but states "*loi* Pétrou is one you do not baptise, as you do other *loi* when they come . . ."—a custom at variance with Mirebalais procedure.

[14] Cf. Parsons (I), 165, however, where the meaning of *morré* is given "to get the spirit."

[15] See Parsons (I), 164–5, for a description of a "shrine" of a worshipper of the *loa*.

[16] Cf. Dorsainvil (I), 115 ff.

[17] This is undoubtedly the explanation of Seabrook's "hermaphroditic god" called Papa Nebo (Gede-nibo), which he shows on pp. 9 and 10 of the plates of his book. As is indicated elsewhere in this volume, Gede, who does not partake of this characteristic in the least, has thus been woefully misunderstood by Seabrook.

[18] Dorsainvil (I), 72–4, describes possession at a *vodun* ceremony, and Wirkus, 173 ff., also gives a description of a possession scene, but his account is pitched so hysterically as materially to lessen its usefulness for serious comparisons.

[19] (I) *passim*, but especially 18–19, 58–61, 86–7, 111–12. A definition of *vodun* more acceptable to those who approach social phenomena from an ethnological and historical point of view is to be found on page 130. Price-Mars (I), 125 ff., gives an extended criticism of Dorsainvil's hypothesis, though from quite a different point of

view from that given here.

[30] Parsons (I), 171, describes how she witnessed a woman "refuse the visitation of her *loa*."

[31] Price-Mars (I), 34, speaks of the "*obligations annuelles de participer par un acte quelconque aux sacrifices cultuels . . .*" laid on the voduist.

[32] St. Mery, i, 51; see also Dorsainvil (I), 46.

[33] Seabrook's description of a "Pétro" ceremony (pp. 31 ff.) deserves, on the basis of its inner inconsistencies, to be considered a masterpiece of misstatement and misinterpretation. Its effect, and the effect of others like it, have done much to perpetuate this incorrect idea of the Pétro rites.

[34] Dorsainvil, Price-Mars, and Parsons all employ these terms, rather than *papaloi* and *mamaloi*, the designations found in more popular books such as those of Craige, Seabrook, and Wirkus. The latter two of these writers seem confused about these words and fail to make it clear whether or not they mean the same or different functionaries of the *vodun* cult when they use the words *houngan* and *papaloi*.

000
114
787

[35] Compare Dorsainvil (I), 75–7 and 121, where he expresses a low opinion of the *hungan*, holding him unreliable and insincere in his worship, as contrasted to the *vrai serviteur*.

793

[36] Op. cit., 175–9.

[37] Even though followers of the *vodun* cult are more organized in some parts of Haiti than in Mirebalais, it is arrant nonsense to speak of a "supreme high priestess" of the cult, its *grande mamaloi*, as does Seabrook, 117, or of a "black pope of voodoo" as Wirkus has done (in *Harper's Magazine*, Vol. 168, pp. 38–49, 188–98; December 1933–January 1934).

114
794
114
114

[38] A sober statement of the degrees of initiation into the cult (although these do not hold for Mirebalais) is to be found in Dorsainvil (I), 168–9, and also 62.

794

CHAPTER IX

[1] Price-Mars (I), 144, gives a long and excellent list of the reasons for offering sacrifices.

[2] A description of a *humfort* destroyed by the Marines during their occupation, and a detailed account of its

789 all aspects of the natural and supernatural. But the reputable cult priest
771 does not dabble in "black" magic—the kind that maims or destroys hu-
793 man beings. One who does so is said to "work with two hands": one for
754 the loa and one for evil. (The expression *servi dé main*—"serving with two hands"—is also applied to a cult chief who deals with deities of more than one "nation.") Many a cult priest in making his ritual flour drawings on the earth holds his left hand behind his back and draws with his right, giving testimony that he "works with one hand" only.

793 Each cult priest maintains his own cult temple, or *hounfor*. There are
794 no cult officials above him, as there is no formal religious organization
[346] beyond the hounfor itself. Within his own special community he is therefore the chief religious functionary, the apex of an intratemple social organization. Under the cult priest, ordinarily, there are two grades of assistants, and below them two classes of servitors.

793 The cult priest is usually referred to as a *houngan*, a Fon (Dahomean)
787 title signifying "spirit chief." Sometimes he is called *gangan* (a Bantu
● 171 word meaning "conjuror" or "doctor")[2] or *capla*. He also is known by the title *bocó* or *bocor*, which seems to be derived from *bocono*, the diviner
791 or priest of the Dahomean Fa cult.[3] The bocor is, in fact, sometimes referred to as a *divineur*, and he is regarded by some Haitians as a clairvoyant and a practitioner of magic. As in Dahomey, the bocor in Haiti foretells fate through the throwing of shells or chips, much in the manner of the secular game *mayamba*. He also reads destiny with small sticks or ashes. In earlier days the cult priest was sometimes known by the Yoruba name *babalao*, a title which has been corrupted to *papaloi*. A female cult
[562] leader is known as a *mambo*. She is presumed to have, in a general way, the same powers as the houngan, though in some quarters her *connaissance*, or "understanding," is not regarded so highly, and her status is believed to be somewhat lower.

794 Directly under the houngan is his chief assistant, the *laplace*, and perhaps a little below him on the ladder, the *mambo caille*. The laplace is regarded as the vice-houngan, and he assumes responsibility for running the hounfor in the absence of his chief. The mambo caille, a woman, runs the cult center in the absence of both the houngan and the laplace. One step farther down the ladder is the *houngénicon*, who acts as a sort of chief of the main body of devotees. These high-ranking assistants to the houngan are sometimes called *badjicans*, or keepers of the altar.

[171] The servitors of the cult are known as *hounsi*, or "spirit wives," a name that was given to certain categories of cult servants in Dahomey.[4] There are two main groups of hounsi: *kanzo* (those who have passed through a ritual fire test) and *bossale* (those whose loa are wild or untamed). The

[2] [Footnote appears on p. 349, Category 116.--Analyst]

[3] [Gorer, Africa Dances, p. 129; Herskovits, Dahomey, I, 208 ff. Cf. p. 349, Category 116. --Analyst]

[4] [Foot note appears on p. 349, Category 116.--Analyst]

The

loa makes his appearance in Vodoun ritual by possessing ("mounting") 794 one or more of the participants. When these possessions first occur, the 787 possessed persons lapse into a kind of frenzy without controls or direction. 776 They may stagger, fall, and go into convulsions. The deity must be controlled so that he will not harm the person whose body he takes over. The [793] houngan eventually establishes a conditioned, formalized response to possession; and once this is achieved, the loa is regarded as having been tamed. The *hounsi bossale* then becomes eligible for elevation to the status of 794 kanzo. The term *kanzo* means "to tie fire"; that is, to conquer or show mastery over fire. Demonstrations of supremacy of possessed persons over flames, hot coals, and red-hot metal characterize many Vodoun rituals. In the kanzo ritual the initiate must undergo the test of boiling oil.

The hierarchy of the cult temple, in general, looks like this: 794 [793]

Houngan (or *Mambo*)—chief of the hounfor
Laplace—first assistant to the houngan
Mambo caille—"mistress of the house"
Houngénicon—topmost of all the hounsi
Hounsi kanzo—the highest grade of hounsi
Hounsi bossale—the lowest grade of hounsi

Among the hounsi there are some who have special duties or functions. There is the *reine silence*, for example, whose job is to maintain order. The one assigned to cook the various sacrifices is called the *hounsi cuisinière*, and so on.

There is no single, clear-cut process for becoming a Vodoun priest. A 793 man with special talents may rise from the rank of hounsi and eventually become a houngan by succession. Or a person with a strong *connaissance* may simply feel the call—sometimes in a dream—and establish himself as a houngan or bocor. If such a man demonstrates that he is "strong," a following will gather around him to constitute his *société*.

When a houngan dies, his cult center may be abandoned, or it may be taken over by another established houngan or by the deceased man's protégé. Frequently the laplace will inherit the cult temple and all that goes with it. Acquisition of a cult center by inheritance is looked upon as a means of keeping an established hounfor intact. The man who wishes to achieve the rank of houngan applies to the oldest and most venerable cult priest in the district and announces that he wishes to receive the *asson* (the ritual rattle) that is, to become a houngan. If the elder priest approves and wishes to sponsor the younger man's elevation, he consults other reputable houngans and arranges for a *grand service* for purification and investiture. The elder cult priest conducts the ceremonies. He is regarded as especially wise because of his age and long experience in dealing with the loa, whose

793 approval of the candidate's elevation is needed. He is also regarded as
[069] being on more intimate terms with the family ancestors who, likewise,
must be in accord with the proceedings. The candidate for the asson is
[783] confined within the hounfor for a number of days, during which he takes
purification baths and participates in other rituals. The rites that take
place during this period are prescribed by the elder priest who has assumed
responsibility. When the purification is ended, the candidate
emerges into the *peristyle* (roofed court) to participate in the general service,
and to undergo further tests.

Present during the ceremonies are all the principal houngans of the
region—men who will be friendly associates of the new priest or, possibly,
unfriendly competitors. The candidate is tested on his knowledge
[789] of how to use the asson and the tiny hand bell, and in the course of the
service he is mounted by the loa who is the chief protector of the cult temple.
[782] Animals are sacrificed, and all the loa sacred to the hounfor are invoked
and asked for their approval and support. But it is not only the loa
[794] and the dead who must indicate their approval. The elder houngan polls
the hounsi kanzo on whether they will accept their new cult chief and follow
[533] him. He also asks the chief drummer, who polls his assistant drummers.
It is taken for granted that the decision is in the hands of the hounsi.
The consensus is known before the actual service, but the formality of
asking the question is observed. Should the hounsi refuse to accept the
candidate for the asson, the elevation cannot take place.

793 The city and the countryside contain many self-styled houngans and
554 bocors who are not recognized as bona fide by the community, regardless
626 of the route by which they claim to have achieved their station. Sometimes
[791] they are regarded as *pas fort* (not strong); that is, they do not have profound
knowledge and understanding. The Haitian is quick to detect the
difference between a houngan who knows and one who does not know.
Many are stated to be outright fakes. One man who attempted to hold
a service in Port-au-Prince aroused such contempt and disgust that a number
of persons who had been drawn by genuine interest walked out with
remarks that the man should be punished. In fact, his failure to show any
[533] essential qualifications for the houngan's role was commented upon in
a song of ridicule that made its appearance at a secular dance that same
night. The song noted some of the humorous aspects of the service, such
as when the "impostor" struck himself vigorously on the head with the
flat of a machete to show his "strength" and virtually incapacitated himself
for the rest of the evening.

346 It is easily observed that no two hounfors are exactly alike. They differ

> in the services. In the court, the bases of four sacred trees . . . are surrounded by circles of masonry [low brick walls]. These *reposoirs* are inhabited by the *loa* Legba, Ogoun, Loco and Saugo.[5] 346 778 333 776

There is little in Aubin's description to suggest that hounfors were much different a half century ago from what they are today. He errs in identifying the "thunder stones" solely with Damballa. But his eye for detail was acute. In 1950 a mambo in the neighborhood of this hounfor described by Aubin affirmed that some of the loa stones and old coins which he mentioned are still to be found among the properties of a hounfor in the Cul-de-Sac Plain. Others were lost in one of the cleric-inspired raids which despoiled cult temples of drums and other paraphernalia about fifteen years ago. 114 346 778 [997]

Many services are held outside the hounfor and the peristyle. Some rituals, such as animal sacrifices and "talking to the loa below the water," may take place some distance from the cult buildings. Indeed, various Vodoun ceremonies may be held at waterfalls, at the seashore, in sacred groves, in ordinary homes, in a boat at sea,[6] or under a sacred tree. 78

The rites of the hounfor are almost without number. They are associated with the supplication or conciliation of virtually countless deities, each of which has his own special service. There are services in multitudinous combinations and permutations for the dead, for twins, for albinos, and for unborn children. There are ceremonies for the elevation of hounsi and for initiation, smoke and fire ordeals, and tests of other kinds. There are *mangé loa* (feasts for the deities) and *mangé morts* (feasts for the dead). There are services for the sick, for the crops, and for the harvest. In one context or another, Vodoun relates to nearly every aspect and phase of life—and its counterpart, death. Since every region, every locality, and, in fact, almost every hounfor has developed its own ritual out of the common materials, it is possible to see hundreds of ceremonies without ever seeing precisely the same one twice. Yet the common elements bind them all together.

One such prime element is the possession, the "mounting" of the human body by one of the deities. Possession is a psychological phenomenon common to the rites of many cults throughout the world. It is known in Asia, Africa, Europe, and America. It is not the unique property of the African and his Haitian descendant. In the United States it is a commonplace not only among certain Negro cults but certain white cults as well. The United States Negro had ample West African inspiration for his seizures in the church and at the baptism. The intellectual meaning of these seizures has changed, as have their outward forms to a measurable extent, but their emotional content has not altered. 787

[5] [Translated from the French of Aubin, En Haiti, pp. 57-59. Cf. p. 349, Category 116.--Analyst]

[6] [Footnote appears on p. 349, Category 116.--Analyst]

782 In Haiti the possession takes many forms, according to the nature of
the deity who has entered the body, and depending on whether the possessed
person has learned to "control" that deity. The possessing, or
"mounting," of the possessed individual is manifest proof of the loa's
[771] existence and his constant proximity. Vodoun is built upon the premise
of the existence of loa, and the possession is the instrument of direct contact
[776] and of constant proof of the loa's imminence.

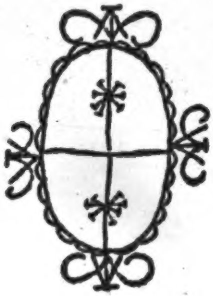
771 Although much of Vodoun is cast in the Dahomean mold, it is no
779 longer what it was originally in Dahomey. Many of the original deities
776 of the Dahomean Earth pantheon, the Sky pantheon, and the Thunder
pantheon have survived. Others have been forgotten, but in their place
there has grown a vast array of loa, recruited partly from the Yoruba
deities and perhaps from deities of other West African tribes. By far the
largest group has come into existence in Haiti—loa whose names, at least,
probably would go unrecognized in West Africa.

177 There have been prolific intrusions into Vodoun from the rites of the
797 Catholic Church, though they have not affected the general framework
771 of the system. The original Dahomean supreme being, Nananbuluku, is
776 nearly forgotten; in her place the Christian God is named in many a Vodoun
service. Yet, though God is the supreme creator, giver, and taker, it
771 is the loa who must be supplicated and mollified. Most important Vodoun
793 rituals are begun under the supervision of the *prêt' savane,* or "bush
797 priest," who leads off with brief prayers from the Catholic rites. While
177 the Catholic Church itself rejects any direct part in Vodoun, the self-tutored
175 prêt' savane, unordained and unsponsored by the Church, brings
elements of its theology into the hounfor. The origins of the prêt' savane
are not clear. But there is little doubt that his place in Haitian life became
assured during the years of conflict between postrevolutionary governments
and the Church of Rome. After the slave revolts of 1791, the
priests of the French colony fled from the scene or went into hiding along
with the other white colonists. From the date of Haitian independence
throughout the following half century, Haiti was "in open schism from
the Roman Catholic Church."[1] Some Haitian presidents were friendly
toward the Catholic Church; others even had the objective of making
Catholicism a state religion with the president at its head. Henry Christophe,
[659] for example, made the Catholic Church official but stipulated that
ecclesiastical decrees must be approved by the president. Alexandre Pétion's
constitution for southern Haiti (the country was divided) also
established the Church as official but laid upon it strong restrictions.

175 Leyburn points out that in 1814 there were in Christophe's kingdom
659 only three priests, one of whom Christophe had named archbishop. Dur-

793 [1] [Leyburn, The Haitian People, p. 119. Cf. p. 349, Category 116. -- Analyst]

[P.19]



3. *The Loa: Gods of the Haitian Mountains*

The supernatural world of the common people of Haiti is a vast, rich, and 776
unexplored world. It is peopled with thousands of gods who may at any time come down a rocky mountain trail, or up from the bottom of the sea, or out of the springs where people drink, to enter the hounfor of the Vodoun priest or the humblest of thatched huts. The gods—variously called *loa, mystère, hounaié,* or *vodoun*‸[1]—may come at strange, unexpected moments to the unlikeliest places. Yet whenever they come they are recognized for what they are. The things they say and do bear the mark of their character and their special powers, and usually there is little disagreement over their identity.

The Haitians tell you that the loa live "in Africa," or on "the island 776
below the sea," or "beneath the water," or in a mythological city called La 772
Ville-aux-Camps. The loa are believed to share this residing place with 787
the spirits of certain categories of the dead. What goes on in the land of the loa is no man's knowledge and every man's conjecture. They say that a few privileged people have been able to go down "below the water" and return.

In the region of Gros Morne there is a legend of a woman named 776
Madame Ste Île who went under the water and returned after seven years. 787
There is another widespread tale of a man near La Bai Moustique who, in full public view, walked into the bay and disappeared, and returned in a few hours bearing a cake in his hands—a gift from the loa below the water. And in the hills near Aux Cayes in the south a story is told about a loa named Général Clermeil, who drove up in a fine carriage and carried off a woman to his place below the water.

On certain occasions the loa come to pass the time among their "children" in Haiti. When a loa comes to the people he enters the body of one or another of them, or he enters many of them at the same time. In cult terminology, these people are his "horses." The loa mounts his horses, as

[1]‸ [For footnote, see category 116, pp. 349-350.--Analyst]

776
787 they say, and "rides" them. What the possessed persons do then depends upon the personality and whim of the loa. Generally they take on the special personal characteristics of the loa. Their voices and manners change and their postures and attitudes undergo transfiguration. They may talk about the "island below the water," about community ancestors, about intimate affairs of the community, or about how things are going back in Africa. Sometimes they utter words or phrases recognized as "African language." And on occasion possessed persons talking *langage* are said to be speaking Greek, Arabic, Hebrew, or Spanish. At the moment of first impact, when the loa enter their heads, they stagger, jerk, and tremble, often falling on the ground. Then, soon afterward, their behavior begins to move in a groove of conventionalized activity.

[346]
[778]
[782] Most commonly the loa arrive during religious rituals or dances. They come by way of the *po'teau mitan,* the center pole which supports the roof of the peristyle. It is around this pole that the sacred vèvès, or flour drawings, are made. At the foot of the pole sacrifices are offered and libations are poured.

787
793
[533] Yet possession may occur anywhere and at any time. The sound of a certain drumbeat may be the signal for it, or a sudden fright, or an emotional crisis, or any situation to which possession has been conditioned. The houngan or the mambo may facilitate possession, control it, and terminate it. The cult priest is acutely sensitive to the conditions favorable to possession. He knows how to heighten emotional tension and how to soften it. A competent houngan "plays" his service as though it were a delicate instrument. He takes everything in, issues instructions to his servitors from time to time, orders the drum tempo increased or diminished, knows how to change pace. Sometimes he hovers in the background unobtrusively, encouraging the singing and dancing like a benevolent father. At other times he comes to the center of the activities and takes command. He becomes the focus of all eyes. His slightest action is watched with intensity. He may take the hand of one of the servitors, pirouette him about, and compel the loa to enter. When the servitor is "mounted," the houngan may conduct him through ritual activity. At the right moment the houngan may help the loa to leave.

776
787 The spectators who observe possession in others are usually aware of the identity of the loa who has entered. When the ancient loa Damballa Wèdo comes in, his "horse" falls to the ground, wriggles like a snake, and makes what are considered to be snakelike sounds in his throat. For Damballa is the venerable deity identified with the rainbow, which in ancient Dahomean lore was thought to be the great serpent come out from the underworld to drink after a rain. When the loa Ogoun Chango enters,

his "horse" may trample in glowing coals, plunge his hands in boiling oil, 776
or play with red-hot iron bars. For Ogoun Chango is a fire-eater—a deity 787
of the forge and of battle. The deity Legba is characterized as a limping
old man. A "horse" possessed by Legba may cavort about on a kind of
cane-crutch called a Legba stick. Each loa has his distinctive mark. As the
Haitians say, "you learn about the loa by watching his horses."

In addition to having homes in Africa or below the water, most loa 776
have special residing places in Haiti, such as stones, caves, trees, waterfalls, 778
or springs. One may come across a boulder or a bamboo grove sacred to [782]
a certain loa, and food offerings are likely to be seen there. Many loa are
identified with some specific variety of tree and will "inhabit" all such
trees throughout the country. Loa Calbassie, for example, lives in the
calabash tree, and Loa Général Brisé in the chardette tree. Offerings to [782]
these deities are set out underneath the tree or hung in its branches, and
services may be held around the trunk.

Loa also live in the old Carib and Arawak celts which are found from
time to time. These "loa stones," as they are called, are identified by their
forms and their ability to pass certain tests. Some Haitians declare the
stones must be able to "whistle," to perspire when blown upon, and to
"talk." The loa stones ordinarily are passed on from one generation to
another, in the hounfor and in the peasant hut alike. In this way the loa
who inhabit them are inherited. Sometimes, but rarely, stones are sold; [432]
disposing of a loa stone requires an elaborate ceremony to guarantee that [782]
the seller will not be injured by the loa, who is likely to feel "wounded."
In such a ceremony the loa is fed and placated and asked to go his way in
peace. The loa stones are sometimes called "thunder stones," in the belief [171]
that they were hurled to earth by the deities Kebiosu, Sobo, and Chango
(all of whom had similar functions among the Arada and Yoruba
peoples of West Africa). The stones are cared for by their owners with
the greatest reverence.

Loa are acquired by individuals in various ways. Many Haitians hold 776
that every infant is born with a *mait' tête*—a spirit who is "master of the
head." In this light, no individual is without a loa, although the deity may
never manifest interest in the individual by an act of possession. A man
may acquire a loa in the course of his life, although in that event the
original mait' tête must be retired from his head. The "inherited" loa
are usually not the personal deities but the special protectors of the house-hold
or the hounfor and are known as "loa of the house" or "family loa."

Should a man acquire a new loa to replace the old as his mait' tête, he 776
must undergo a ceremony known as *lavé tête*—the "washing of the head." 789
The old loa is retired and sent away, leaving the field clear for the new

776 one. Sometimes a loa who is making life too hard for a devotee will be
789 retired without a replacement. The "washing of the head" must be ac-
companied by ritual safeguards, and all possible circumstances must be
[828] taken into account by the officiating cult priest. There are many stories
of people who became mentally deranged as a result of the removal of
their loa from their heads.

776 The mait' tête must also be removed from the head of a person who dies.
764 Should this not be done, the spirit of the deceased will go to reside "below
[775] the water" and may cause trouble for the family. This loa is usually trans-
ferred to a special jar as a temporary resting place, and later perhaps into
the head of another member of the family.

776 Though the loa is a powerful ruling force in the life of the individual,
787 the human "horse" has controls over his deity too. He may reproach or
789 admonish his loa for bad behavior or for failing to protect him. He may
expose the loa's irresponsibility in public through the use of songs in
religious rites. And though the loa is frequently encouraged to "enter,"
steps may be taken to restrain him from possession. This is called *marré loa*
—"tying the loa." A woman may "tie" her loa by fixing a hairpin in her
hair in a special way. A man may do it by placing his hands in cold water.[3]

776 Nevertheless, the loa are always lurking in the background. They are
a constant and dramatic element in the religious life of the people. They
may sometimes be controlled by the houngan, but they are an authority
stronger than the priesthood. They give advice, courage, consolation, and
status to their followers. They add much to an otherwise hard and un-
generous environment and evoke remembrances of Africa from which
[152] the Haitians' ancestors were uprooted. They can also cause concern and
anxiety; for the loa are not always benevolent, and they are frequently
unpredictable.

776 Many of the loa are ancient deities, sib-founders and ancestors who loom
171 out of a misty, half-forgotten past. Nananbouclou, Legba, and Ayida
Wèdo have been known for many lifetimes in Dahomey. Chango, Ogoun,
and Loko were old spirits in Nigeria before the first slave ships sailed from
Africa to the New World. Their names and many others in present-day
Haiti come from an ancient lore. They recall places, tribes, and old king-
doms from Senegal in northwestern Africa to the heart of the Congo.
[182] They are a bond which holds the people of Haiti to Africa. In the moun-
tains people sometimes say, "Haiti is the child of Dahomey," or "Haiti is
the child of Guinée." The gods divide their time between their Haitian
and their African children.

776 Yet in some respects the Haitians' concept of their loa is no longer purely
177 African. The African religious patterns have been infiltrated by the lore
171
797

The loa, like the rites, vary somewhat according to region and to the
practices of the individual cult priests. New concepts spring up, and they 776
thrive in one locality while remaining unheard of in another. Yet many 184
new concepts travel from hounfor to hounfor. As in the old days in 792
Dahomey, the Vodoun priests sometimes make journeys to visit other cult 794
centers. At one service near Jacmel, on the south coast, I met a houngan 787
from Dondon in the far north and heard him discuss with the local cult chief the appropriate behavior of a loa who had mounted a servitor. The Dondon houngan declared that in the north the loa conducted himself differently. The Jacmel houngan parried with the remark that a loa's behavior is consistent. He said there were only two possibilities concerning the possession as described by the cult chief from Dondon: either the loa had been mistakenly identified, or another deity had attempted to impersonate him. Such exchanges hasten the spread of developing theology from one area to another. They also raise contradictions which remain forever insoluble.

That confusions and contradictions are not merely of Haitian making is 114
made clear by Herskovits' voluminous study of the pantheons of Da- 794
homey.[3] Each of the great cults—the sky cult, the earth cult, and the 177
thunder cult—has its own explanations of the origins and functions of the deities; and even within one cult there are contradicting explanations. The Haitians have taken over, built upon, and diverged from a Dahomean system that contained its own contradictions. In adding to it the system of the Yoruba, with its parallelisms and similarities, they have made the whole picture more complex than ever.

[3] [Herskovits, Dahomey. Cf. p. 350, Category 116. --Analyst]

> 764 father when you were living. Continue to protect your family after death. If you
> 766 need other services give abundantly to your heirs in order to obtain satisfaction. Oh,
> 793 good father, good servant, good parent, good friend! Good-bye! Do not forget us as
> 776 we shall not forget you."[11]

[539] Then the houngan goes to the canarie, strikes it three times with a piece of palm bark, and chants an invocation to the loa and to God, while members of the family dance where they stand, shaking the green branches [787] they hold. There follows an invocation to twins. After a number of loa have "entered" the service, as manifested by possessions, the houngan undertakes to find out how death came to the deceased man. An assistant brings the sacred divining shells[12] of the dead man, and the officiating houngan throws them on the floor, pours tafia three times, and lights a candle. The shells are then consulted. Three times he goes through the procedure of casting the shells and consulting them. Later he announces that "the death of Boss Marius is not the death of an ordinary man, that [775] he is now resting in La Ville-au-Camp (capital of the loas which is 'under the water'), and that the loas will continue to protect his descendants provided that they show themselves worthy of protection."[13] There is more singing and ritual, and then the canarie is covered. The loa from the head of Marius has found a temporary resting place. A little later in the service "the houngan raises the canari as high as possible, almost as high as his face, as he repeats the last line: 'Where may I find refuge?' With a quick movement the canari is shattered. The food is scattered, the loas are satisfied, and the crowd breaks into disorderly flight. . . ."[14] A few hours later the body of the deceased is buried.

764 184 776 It is obvious that these rituals vary a good deal according to regional practices and according to the importance of the persons for whom they are conducted. Furthermore, there is a good deal of difference of opinion among Haitians as to what actually takes place when the maît' tête is taken from the head of the deceased man.

793 764 184 Although the prêt' savane (bush priest) is subsidiary to the houngan at death rites, his is nevertheless a conspicuous presence. He may begin the services with prayers for the dead, in which the family joins, while the houngan remains in the background. Later, the houngan takes over. In certain regions, however, the prêt' savane is dispensed with altogther, his function being absorbed by the houngan.

764 As reported by Herskovits, the wake for the dead is one of the most important ceremonies in the death rites. He says:

> [766] **Wakes are held for all dead, even for very young children if they have been baptized, though if a baby dies before baptism, it is buried without ceremony in a little box in the courtyard of the habitation. . . . The wife and the children either stay**

[11] [This and the preceding paragraph are from Simpson, op. cit., p. 156. Cf. p. 350, Category 116.--Analyst]

[12] [For footnote, see Category 116, p. 350. --Analyst]

[13] [Simpson, op. cit., p. 159, Cf. p. 350, Category 116. --Analyst]

[14] [Ibid, p. 161. Cf. p. 350, Category 116. --Analyst]

5. *Services for the Loa and the Family Ancestors*

The Ordeal by Fire: Kanzo

To advance beyond the lowest status in the hounfor, the hounsi must 794
undergo the test of fire. This ritual is known as *kanzo,* meaning "to tie 789
fire." In the drama of the hounfor there are many tests and ordeals. When 796
certain loa enter, the mounted persons will eat broken glass. Other loa 787 ●
will cause their "horses" to rub hot pepper in their eyes. Still others will compel possessed persons to cut themselves with machetes. But these are bravado actions of the deities who have entered into the bodies of the servitors. The kanzo test is a formalized and premeditated ritual, in which it is demonstrated that the power of the cult—and the spirit of the individual—is superior to fire. Once having passed through this rite, the ordinary hounsi becomes a *hounsi kanzo.*

The kanzo ceremony—or, as it is known in some parts of Haiti, the *brulé zin* (the boiling pot)—is performed in diverse ways according to the tradition of the particular hounfor. But common to all is the dipping of the hands into boiling oil.

The common hounsi, the bossale, is prepared gradually for kanzo. In the course of certain rites she undergoes a smoke ordeal. On all fours, her head close to a fire, she must breathe in smoke without choking or coughing. When these and other tests indicate that she is ready, she will be permitted to undergo the rite of the brulé zin.

Near the town of Thomazeau in the Cul-de-Sac Plain I witnessed one of
these rituals. It began with a dance, in which only the hounsi of the cult
participated. They were all dressed in white. The chief drummer wore a
woman's blouse, a kerchief on his head, and on top of that a woman's
straw hat. He played alone while the houngan invoked the loa Legba. [793]
Then there were songs for Ogoun, and the dancing resumed.

The dance court was larger than average—about forty feet by sixty, 793 794 787 796 Attached to the ever-present po'teau mitan, or center post, were three oil lamps which threw a flickering light. At the entrance to the dance court a glowing-hot iron bar stood erect in a charcoal fire—the symbol of kanzo and of the loa Ogoun.

789 When the preliminary dances were over, the hounsi retired to one side of the court, where they sat in two rows facing the center.

Ritual rattle and bell in hand, the houngan took his place by the sacred center post. He was an elderly man with a gray beard. He wore a red kerchief like a turban around his head. He smoked a cigar, and in his free hand he held a bottle of rum. The red kerchief, the rum, and the cigar were all in honor of Ogoun. He moved back and forth across the center of the court, talking casually, even joking and laughing. The drums began again, on a signal from the houngan, and a number of visiting houngans [535] and mambos came forward and began a stately Jenvalo dance. The backs of their hands touching their knees, their backs bent low, they moved slowly counterclockwise around the center post. The mambos outnumbered the houngans four to one. The hounsi sitting on the sidelines sang. The song was for Maitresse Ézilie. The houngan in charge stood by patiently, deep in thought. His assistant, the laplace, kept time with a small rattle and led the singing.

When the song came to an end, the visiting cult priests and priestesses retired from the dance ground. Again the hounsi danced. Afterward the houngan began to talk *langage*, twirling his bottle of rum about recklessly. He was speaking to a loa. The chief drummer beat out a salute to Ogoun. Then the houngan raised the bottle and placed it to his ear. It gurgled away, some of the liquid trickling down his face. He seemed to be swallowing the rum.

While all the hounsi, with bowed heads, sat on the ground, the houngan recited from the ritual of the Catholic service. Latin words, then Creole words in Latin cadences. After a while the houngan's assistant took over the recitation, and the hounsi answered him responsively.[1] When the prayers were over, the hounsi arose and passed into the hounfor. The drums began a fast Nago rhythm, and the hounsi emerged with brilliant silk flags studded with tiny brass rivets. The houngan's chief assistants—the laplace and the houngénicon—carried military sabers upraised. The dancers circled in single file around the center post, a triumphal military heralding of the deity of war and the forge.

To the accompaniment of a crescendo of drums, the procession suddenly reversed its direction. Watching the upraised saber of the laplace for a signal, the hounsi reversed their direction again.

000 When the dance drama ended, the hounsi carried the flags back into

[1] [Note that the houngan and the laplace are performing services normally performed by the prêt savane. Cf. p. 351, Category 116. -- Analyst]

when the dance drama ended, the hounsi carried the flags back into
the hounfor. Then they sat on the ground while the houngan came for- 793
ward to the center post to make his ritual flour drawing. Holding the flour 794
in his hand, he allowed a little of it to trickle out in a fine white line. He 787
worked rapidly, with half-closed eyes, speaking *langage*. A complicated 789
white geometric pattern grew on the earth around the center post. Among 796
its intricate designs highly stylized phallic forms were discernible. When 532
the houngan had finished the drawing, he wrote the name of the loa
whom they were serving: Ogoun Badagry. Then the other houngans and
mambos came forward, one at a time, to add to the design. When the vèvè
was completed it covered virtually the entire dance court.

The laplace came from the hounfor with a bundle of brilliantly colored 793
beads. He stood by the houngan at the center post. One by one the hounsi 794
came before the houngan, dropped on their knees, and kissed the ground. 787
Around each hounsi's neck the houngan placed a string of beads. He raised 789
her, pirouetted her first to the right, then to the left. The pirouette was to 796
encourage possession by the loa.

From the hounfor the hounsi now brought herbs and vegetables for the [782]
sacrifice. Baskets and bottles were set out neatly on the ground, along with
bundles of sticks and the iron pots, or *zins*.

The dance was resumed in a single rotating line around the houngan and the ritual offerings. Two hounsi in the center of the circle built fires, one on each side of the court. Over the fires they set the ritual iron pots. They poured oil into the pots and began the preparation of ritual food balls, like dumplings, from the ingredients at hand. One by one they dropped the dumplings into the oil, which was soon boiling.

The drumming, singing, and dancing were sustained at a high tension. A second team of drummers took over without a break in the music. The dancers now were almost exhausted. With a quick motion, the houngan spilled some rum into one of the boiling pots. A blue alcohol flame shot high into the air. Some of the hounsi screamed but continued to dance. Three of them fell to the ground, their limbs jerking uncontrollably. The loa had entered. Two of the "mounted" hounsi arose and continued to dance, staggering and jerking across the dance court. The third had to be lifted and carried into the hounfor.

The man who was to undergo initiation was waiting in the *djévo,* a special room in the hounfor. For the past seven days he had lain on a mat in the djévo, in virtual isolation except for visits from the houngan and the laplace.

Now the kanzo initiate was brought out, completely covered with a white cloth. Only his hands and feet could be seen. With one hand on the shoulder of the laplace, who preceded him, he moved with the dancers

794 in a circle around the two boiling pots. On the seventh circuit of the
787 course, the laplace stopped him at the first pot. The houngan grasped the
789 man's free hand and, bending down, dipped it into the boiling oil. There
796 was no visible indication of pain. They moved to the second pot, and the
793 man's hand was dipped again. They proceeded again to the first pot, where the dipping was repeated, then back again to the second pot. The neophyte's hand entered the boiling oil seven times in all. He made no sound, showed no resistance, no reflexes. Then the hounsi took him back to the hounfor. It was all over. After three days of isolation, they said, he would be kanzo.

The houngan peeled an orange, while everyone crowded close to watch. In it he found a two-gourde note. He peeled another orange and found in it a slip of paper with the name of a woman on it. She came forward, and everyone laughed. She was an old woman, the oldest of the hounsi. The houngan held the two-gourde note between his teeth. The old woman took the other end of the note in her teeth, but she had to kiss the houngan before he would let go.

796 The ritual of brulé zin, or kanzo, is of unmistakable West African ori-
794 gin. Herskovits has described a ceremony in Dahomey which in many
171 details could easily have taken place in Haiti. The Dahomean rite was in honor of the gods of the Thunder pantheon. Here, too, we find a pot of boiling palm oil, in which are the sacred dumplings: "When the fire had finally subsided and only a faint column of smoke issued from the pot, the initiate came dancing toward it, thrust her hand into the boiling oil, and lifted out a dumpling. . . ."[2]

FAMILY RITES AT LÉOGANE

769 These services for family ancestors took place in the mountains above
796 Léogane at the ancestral home of my friend Libera Borderau. They were
787 conducted on the grounds of his grandmother's house. The ritual began
778 with dancing. Against the wall of the house sat the three drummers with their Arada drums. Near them, leaning against the wall, were the flags of the family loa. Also near by was a long high table serving as a makeshift altar called the *pé*. In the very center of the table in a clean white dish lay eight loa stones—old Carib artifacts. The stones were identical in shape, all of them perfectly symmetrical, resembling small, pointed cigars. In the *pierre-loas* lived the family deities, and much of the ceremony was built around them. The stones had been bathed and polished in oil for the occasion. Set around the plate of stones were numerous small *criches* (French, *cruches*—clay water jugs), glass bottles, and earthenware jars which also contained loa. On the low bench before the table, seven dishes

[2] [Herskovits, Dahomey, II, 165. Cf. P 351, Cat. 116.—Analyst]

were set out in a row, and before them four *conis,* the half-gourd bowls 769
used in services to the marassas, the twin spirits. 796

In the house, at the center of the floor, was a round flat stone about ten 787
inches in diameter and about two inches thick, resembling a millstone. 778
This was the *pierre-manman,* the mother stone responsible for the coming of the other loa stones and who cared for them in the absence of the family. In this stone, they said, was the spirit of the old loa Nananbouclou. On a mat in the corner of the room two children slept.

Outside, on a chair, his back against the wall of the house, the houngan 769
sat, his rattle and bell in hand. He had come several miles to conduct the 796
service. Most of those who danced were his own hounsi. The houngan 787
was "strong" and well known in the region; people said he had worked 793
for high government officials, including the president himself.

After several rounds of Arada dancing in which children as well as 769
adults took part, the drums stopped. The houngan and his laplace moved 796
up to the building which served for the night as the hounfor. It was up a 794
steep slope, about a hundred feet from the dance court. There they pre- 787
pared for the sacrifice to Chébo Profiel, the honored loa of the evening. Passing in and out among the spectators was a woman who would be possessed by Papa Chébo; since he was the guest of the service, she (or the loa in her head) was free to come and go as she chose, to speak as she pleased, and to do what she wished. Mostly she shook hands with people, a ceremony which continued throughout the night. First she would offer the right hand, then the left; or perhaps both at once, in which case the hands would be shaken downward vigorously three or four times. Someone ignorantly said, "Bon soir, Madame!" and she turned on him to reprimand his insolence. She was not "Madame," she was *l'Autorité,* the Authority.

During the course of the evening the conviction became stronger and stronger in her that she was Chébo Profiel. From the time we first saw her until the end of the evening her personality underwent marked changes. She "became" Papa Chébo.

The houngan sat before a small hole, possibly a foot deep and ten inches 782
in diameter, in front of the hounfor. The fresh earth was piled neatly to 793
the side, and an enameled plate was set on top of it. Around the hole were 796
the various dishes to be offered to Chébo Profiel. The laplace prayed in 787
Latin, a short Catholic service. Then the houngan, shaking his beaded 769
rattle and tinkling his bell, called for Chébo to "enter." He made a small
maize-flour drawing around the hole, and then began the feeding of the [502]
loa. The plates arranged for the feast contained roasted maize, roasted peanuts, bread, cassava, rice, and other foods. There were bottles of rum,

793 kola (a soft drink), *clairin*, and syrup. The houngan, entreating Chébo to
796 accept, poured a little *clairin* into the hole. The loa seemed to accept, for
782 the *clairin* was quickly absorbed in the ground. The houngan took rice
● 787 from the plate with his fingers, about the amount he might place in his
769 own mouth, and put it gently into the hole. He was feeding Papa Chébo, literally placing the food in his mouth. After the rice, which was dry, the houngan poured in a little more *clairin* to moisten it. He ordered the laplace to break up the bread, and then he placed a small piece in the hole and washed it down with a little rum. The houngan seemed to understand that Papa Chébo Profiel was hungry, and that he was also an epicure. He allowed him to taste the roasted corn, and then washed it down with a trickle of kola. Then he gave him a taste of the roasted peanuts, and another morsel of bread. Once Chébo got his mouth too full in his zest for the meal, and the assemblage had to wait for him to finish "coughing." Then the houngan gave him a long drink of kola to clear his windpipe. After that the houngan was more careful in the way he fed him—a little cassava, a drink, a little bread. As the houngan fed the loa, some of the spectators reached over and placed small coins in the empty dish by the hole. These too were for Chébo. Finally, Chébo was through eating. The food was gone.

769 The houngan, shaking his rattle and his bell, blew two sharp notes on
794 his whistle. At the door of the hounfor appeared l'Autorité, the hounsi
787 possessed by Papa Chébo. More than ever she resembled the loa, and less
796 than ever she resembled herself. In one hand she held a saber. Her bodily
[793] movements were spasmodic, as though she was being forced to do things
[534] to which she was not accustomed. She moved slowly into the circle, her eyes almost closed; she leaned backward, then twisted grotesquely around, jerked this way and that, buffeted by the loa. Suddenly she began to whirl.
[793] The houngan called "Tambouyé!" and the drummers beat a slow complicated rhythm, a salute to Chébo. The loa had really "entered" now. There was no mistaking the jerky, irresponsible movements of the hounsi's head and shoulders. She leaned backward as though about to fall, incredibly kept her balance, rolled forward as though she were going to plunge to the ground, and twisted herself upright once more. The saber passed close to the faces of the spectators, even scratched some of them and cut their clothing. Her movements had a definitely masculine character. Chébo Profiel was a man.

782 She reached over to seize a chicken that was held out to her. Grasping
787 its legs with her free hand, she continued her spinning, twisting, lurching
794 dance. Then she cradled the chicken, rocking it back and forth until it
796 was in a hypnotic trance. She placed it on the ground before a tiny pile
769

of ground maize prepared by the laplace. The chicken, released, sat mo- 782
tionless, making no effort to escape. All watched attentively, the houngan 787
shaking his rattle and bell. Suddenly the chicken cocked its head and, 769
seeming to see the corn for the first time, reached out and pecked at it. 794
This was the loa receiving the sacrifice—a difficult conception if one thinks 796
of the chicken itself as the sacrifice. "Chébo," l'Autorité, snatched the chicken up, danced violently about, the loa in full possession of her body. With a swift movement of the saber, she cut the chicken's throat and caused the first drop of blood to fall into the hole. When the chicken stopped struggling, it was left there, head downward. L'Autorité took up a cock which was given her, cradled him, and set him before the ground maize. When he pecked at it, she picked him up and danced, around and around, jerking, lunging, never quite falling. She took his comb between her teeth, supporting his body gently with her hands, and spun around and around. Then she released him, cut his throat, and placed him in the hole with the chicken.

At the side of the hounfor, waiting, was a goat (called by the ritual name Dogwé). He had a fine silky white coat and a long beard. He was brought in to the place of sacrifice, and l'Autorité dropped to her knees to embrace his neck with her arms. She remained there a moment, her cheek against his, talking to him. Then she arose, a machete in hand instead of a saber, and began to pirouette while three men threw the goat on his side. Then she cut with the machete, and the goat's blood, too, began to run into the hole. For the first time her dance became unquestionably frenzied. She swung strong, full blows of the machete at the goat's neck, finally severing the head. From the hindquarters she cut a piece of red meat and placed it in her mouth.

At a signal from the houngan, three men carried the goat's body away to be dressed and cooked, and a woman came forward to wipe the blood from Papa Chébo's face.

The drums began again, a Dahomé dance, and the people relaxed. Many [535]
joined in the dancing while l'Autorité strutted about shaking hands and talking *langage*. She also danced, with gestures and movements wholly masculine. At one point she briefly advanced on another woman, making sexual gestures.

The houngan and his houngénicon retired to the front room of the hut. 769
A new mat had been placed there for the houngénicon. She lay down on it, 793
and the houngan sat in a chair against the wall. This was the beginning 794
of the ceremony of calling *les morts en bas dleau* (the dead below the 796
water).

Meanwhile, before the hounfor, the laplace and a hounsi were building [346]

While those in the front room were singing, l'Autorité, in the inner 764
room, was suddenly thrown about violently by her possession. She raced 794
into one wall of the hut, striking her head, flung herself back against the 796
opposite wall, kicking, trembling, calling out strange *langage*. She crashed 787
into the pé, upsetting the dishes, and then fell across the mat where the children were lying half asleep. One of them, a boy of about four, became hysterical. He knew the woman, but he had never seen her like this. His mother carried him to the front room, where she finally quieted his crying. L'Autorité, spent for the moment, lay across the mat. No one touched her. Later, when the singing was resumed, she got to her feet and made the rounds once more, shaking hands again and again. She was now smoking a pipe.

When the houngan heard the rain subsiding, he again called out [793]
"Abobo!" as though he were giving the order to cease, and everyone, himself included, laughed again. When it had definitely stopped, someone went out to shake the water from the canopy. The drums were brought out of their shelter, and although the ground was sticky with mud, the dancing was resumed. The houngan asked for a fast Nago dance, and the front room of the hut was once more emptied of everyone except the houngan and his houngénicon.

The laplace and his assistant went up the hill to put the finishing touches 769
to the *card*, the temporary structure in which the houngan was going to 793
receive the loa and the dead. From a small chest of chinaware, the houn- 794
génicon set a "table" for the loa on the ground where she sat. The sacrifice 796
had been for a single loa, Chébo; the rest of the service was for all the loa 787
served by the family. The houngan, sitting next to the houngénicon, [346]
sounded his rattle and spoke *langage*. He sang quietly, a song which only the houngénicon could hear, watching her intently. A large basket of dishes, bottles, and various other paraphernelia was brought by a hounsi. Candles were lighted and set on the ground. The houngan gave a signal, and the hounsi brought a large square of white cotton cloth, which they stretched tight over the houngénicon like a canopy. The candle flame and the silhouette of the houngénicon could be seen through the cloth, but the details of the service were not visible. Sometimes, the houngan, his bell and rattle in hand, would go under the cloth to assist in the calling of the loa. Then, without warning, things began to happen very rapidly.

One of the hounsi who sat before the door began to quiver and make strange noises in her throat: "Ka, ka, k-k-k-k-k-k-a!" Her body shook violently, and her head rolled on her shoulders. Almost simultaneously something began to happen under the cloth where the houngénicon was, and the members of the family crowded up to the *card* by the hounfor. The houngénicon lay stiffly, her eyes closed, the white cloth removed. The

769 houngan carried out the large round basket in which lay the bottles and
793 the pierre-loas. The hounsi gathered around it, ten of them, to carry it to
794 the *caye*. In the bottles were *les morts en bas dleau* (the spirits of the dead
796 from below the water). Carrying the flags, three hounsi danced, singing,
787 up to the *caye*. After them the laplace came, carrying in his left hand a
plate of maize flour from which he made vèvès in the line of advance, simple marks symbolizing the crossroads. The drums were beating a special salute to the loa. The ten hounsi carrying the basket danced and sang. As they moved up the hill, they rotated, so that the basket revolved like the
[535] hub of a wheel. Their progress was not smooth, however; they jerked forward and backward as they rotated. Arriving before the *caye*, first one, then a second, was entered by her loa. They fell, jerked, and stumbled. This was all a very good omen. The houngan called "Abobo!" for them to resist such possession, and the hounsi all sat down on the ground. The houngan placed the basket inside the *caye* and entered after it. He called for his little bell, which the laplace passed in to him. The laplace closed the flap down tight, from the outside, and placed the flags against it.

Upon a signal given from within, the hounsi began a song:

[539]
La famille semblé,
Oh semblé nous!
La famille semblé,
Oh nous semblé pou nou pa'lé parole nous là!
La famille semblé!

The family gathers,
Oh, we gather!
The family gathers,
Oh, we gather to speak our words here!
The family gathers!

769 The laplace took his position, his back to the *caye*, while inside, because
796 of the candle burning there, the houngan could be seen setting out the
787 contents of the basket. The candle went out, and in the *caye* the little bell
794 began to tinkle. The singing stopped. The houngan was beginning to
[793] talk to the dead below the water. First he talked *langage*. Then his voice
was heard through the constant sound of the tiny bell, supplicating Papa Loko to talk a little bit with his "children." A faint, tremulous voice, that of a tired old grandfather, was heard to answer. Papa Loko was stirring himself out of a long silence. He talked a long while to the houngan. Sometimes they both spoke at once. Faintly he was heard to say that he had come a long way to see his children, and that he was very tired. But as he talked his strength returned to him, and, asking the houngan to wait, he spoke directly to his "children," who sat, respectfully and awed,

around the *caille*. Here everyone participated. This was why they had 769
come. Benevolently Papa Loko greeted them: "Bonjou, ti moune moin 796
yo, c'est Papa Loko" (Good day, all my children, this is Papa Loko). Together 787
they all answered eagerly: "Bon soir, Papa!" "Bon soir, Grand!" "Bon soir, cher Papa!" "Bon soir, cher Loko!" Papa Loko told them about his journey, and persons long dead whom he had seen below the water, and he passed on the news from the island below the sea. Then he began to address them singly, asking questions, giving news of dead relatives, and showing a vital interest in the problems of his "children." They answered him. "Oui, Papa," and "Non, Papa Loko," and took deeply to heart anything he said, whether praise or criticism:

[539]

Bon jour, Télisman!	Good day, Télisman!
Bon soir, Papa!	Good evening, Papa!
Comment nou yé, Télisman?	How are you, Télisman?
Tout bien, Papa Loko!	Everything is fine, Papa Loko!
C'est ou même qui travaille tou dia?	Are you one who works very hard?
Oui, Papa, moin travaille en pile.	Yes, Papa, I work a great deal.
Ou travaille pou' vié moman ou?	You care for your old mother?
Oui, Papa.	Yes, Papa.
Télisman, pitit moin, faut ou planté jardin ou encore. Graine, li pas bon.	Télisman, my child, you will have to plant your garden again. The seeds you planted are no good.
Merci, cher Loko!	Thank you, dear Loko!
Ou pas blié'm, Télisman.	You do not forget me, Télisman.
Non, cher Loko.	No, dear Loko.
Yo dit ou pralé travaille en ville.	They say you are going to work in the city.
Lé'm capab', Papa.	When I can, Papa.
Pas blié moune morne ça yo, Télisman.	Do not forget the people of the hills, Télisman.
Non, cher Loko, m' pas blié yo.	No, dear Loko, I will not forget them.
Papa ou dit'm ba ou bon soir pou'li.	Your father asked me to say good evening to you for him.
Merci, Papa.	Thank you, Papa.
Papa Loko fini pa'lé ou, Télisman.	Papa Loko is through talking to you, Télisman.
Merci, Papa.	Thank you, Papa.
Chongé 'm, Télisman.	Remember me, Télisman.

Papa Loko talked in turn to everyone in the family who was present, and inquired, sometimes suspiciously, after those who were absent. After many minutes, Papa Loko said regretfully that he had to go away, and bade them au revoir. They were all sorry he was leaving, because he was well loved. He spoke a few words with the houngan, and then his voice faded away. Only the tinkling of the little bell remained.

769
796
● 987

Then, faintly, came the broken voice of an old woman who was crying. The houngan said her children were waiting to see her, and asked her to enter. Moyise had been dead many generations already, but she was still crying over the circumstances of her death, and because she had left her children behind her. The houngan, speaking gently, asked her to try to stop crying because her children were waiting. Little by little she controlled herself. She greeted them all and talked with each member of the family in turn. She showed a special interest in the women and children and was concerned about family problems.

After Moyise went away, Docile, Moyise' daughter, came. She greeted them all and then complained that when she had died she had been buried in a grave near that of a thief; now she wished for her body to be moved. Alixe, on whose place the grave was situated, promised to take care of the matter, and Docile became placated. Her voice faded away. Inside the *card*, the houngan talked *langage* and rang his bell.

After Docile came Joseph and his son Jougleau. Joseph and Jougleau timed their entrance badly and came in together, both talking at once. The houngan tried to straighten out the situation, and for a moment the three of them were conversing simultaneously. Then Jougleau withdrew and returned when his father was through. After Jougleau came still later generations, represented by Ti Perci and her children, Na and Bernicia. Bernicia came crying bitterly about something. The houngan asked her to stop, because he could not bear to hear women crying. Everyone laughed, and Bernicia controlled herself.

[776] Then Damballa Wèdo, the ancient loa, came, speaking with an aged and broken voice. Feebly he sang his song in "African" language:

[539]
Ago! Damballa Wèdo!
Oh Damballa Wèdo kian kian!
Oh Damballa Wèdo kian kian!
Oh ha ha ha Damballa Wèdo kian kian!
Oh Damballa Wèdo kian kian! [Ex. 39]

[776] Later, Damballa sang again, calling on Legba to act as witness to his words:

[539]
Ago-é Attibon Legba oh é!
Oh Damballa Wèdo é kélé manyan!
Oh gainyain jou' ya chongé moin là kélé manyan!
Oh Damballa Wèdo é kélé manyan!
Oh Ayida Wèdo é kélé manyan!
Oh gainyain jou' pou' chongé moin là kélé manyan! [Ex. 40]

Ago-é Attibon Legba oh é!
Oh, Damballa Wèdo *é, kélé manyan!*

Oh, a day will come when they will remember me here, *kèlè manyan!* 796
Oh, Damballa Wèdo *é, kèlè manyan.* 769
Oh, Ayida Wèdo *é, kèlè manyan!* 787
Oh, a day will come for you to remember me here, *kèlè manyan!* [539]

During the evening about twenty loa and ancestors came into the *card* to talk. When the last had finished speaking the hills were already light, and the service was over. [776]

SERVICE FOR ÈZILIE FRÈDA AND ST. JACQUES MAJEUR

This service took place not in the open but under a tonnelle surrounded by four walls, adjoining the hounfor of Alexis Stephan on the west fringes of Port-au-Prince. Separate from the hounfor and dance court was a shrine to the "dead" loa Gèdé Nimbo. The shrine was a small shed open on one side. Within, lighted by flickering oil lamps, was a life-size effigy of Gèdé, a scarecrow-like figure dressed in the loa's traditional attire—black tail coat and trousers, and a tall opera hat. On the otherwise blank face of the figure were smoked glasses with white rims. 796 776 346 [532] [354]

The dancing was progressing under the supervision of the houngan's adjutant, the laplace. He wandered among the drummers and dancers, encouraged the singing, and issued orders here and there. No one seemed to take him very seriously. There was a good deal of joking, and the gathering seemed very much like an old-fashioned family reunion. There were perhaps a hundred dancers and spectators—friends, relatives, and devotees of Stephan's hounfor. Everyone was watching with affection an old woman who could not be restrained from dancing. She executed old classical steps and postures with a skill that called for running comment all around her. As each piece came to an end someone would step up to her and say something like: "Woy, Manman, mais ou passé mwé!" (Oh, Mother, you are better than me!). Then they would attempt to get her to sit down again, but she would only shake them off and urge the drummers to get going if they were not too tired. 796 [794] [522]

Eventually, the houngan, Stephan, made a casual entrance through the door of his adjoining hounfor. He held the usual ritual rattle and bell in his hand, and sauntered around to chat with his friends. [793] [534]

Gradually, almost imperceptibly, the dancing became more serious. Soon, only the hounsi, the female servitors, were dancing. The drums played a salute to Legba, the first loa to be called upon in a Vodoun service. For it is Legba who opens all gates and all highways, and who paves the way for communication with other deities. Though he is not the greatest of the loa, he is one of the most ancient. The houngan spilled water on the ground as a libation, and the dancing continued. 796 776 [794] [782]

796 793 [554] [202] Then a well-dressed young man entered, and the drummers swiftly changed to the salute reserved for guests of distinction. The hounsi sang, "Président passe là, l'ap monté au gouvernment!" and waved paper flags and kerchiefs. The young man was a distant relative of Stephan's; he also was a houngan.

After a while Stephan brought from his hounfor a second asson, or ritual rattle, and another small hand bell, both of which he handed to the [576] young man. He was extending the courtesy of his hounfor, sharing his instruments of authority and religious power with his fellow houngan. Then followed an exhibition between the two houngans that was half duel and half ballet. They stood face to face, each of them holding the asson in one hand and the tiny bell in the other. Stephan was "testing" the young houngan for the edification of all present. Each tiny move made by Stephan was duplicated simultaneously by his guest, as though he were a mirrored reflection.

Every posture Stephan made was duplicated instantly by his guest. The assons and the bells were agitated constantly. The rattle in the young man's hand did precisely what Stephan's did. The two men looked into each other's eyes with intensity, as though this bound their movements together and unified them. When Stephan twisted to the left, the other houngan twisted to the right. Every contortion of the young man was an exact replica of Stephan's movements. The two assons rattled out the same rhythms and the same signals; so did the bells. The backdrop for this "test" was provided by the drummers. The faces of the two men broke into a sweat from the intense nervous effort. At last it came to an end. A woman came forward and wiped their faces with a colored kerchief. The "testing" ceremony was over. The visiting houngan had been proved.

796 793 ● 787 [532] [794] [776] Stephan then made a ritual vèvè, or maize-flour ritual drawing on the ground. Afterward there was more singing and dancing by the hounsi. They sang several songs for Ézilie Fréda, the "pure" loa. And Alexis Stephan went into a trance. It was unexpected. The servitors had not prepared for it. In this emergency the visiting houngan took over. He seemed a little anxious. He was unfamiliar with the particular psychological factors at play in this particular hounfor. He was not certain of the character of Stephan's possession. But he took over grimly. The houngénicon, an older woman, stepped forward to help. While the young houngan wielded the asson and bell, the woman issued instructions. Stephan, his head hanging back, his eyes closed, was supported by two of the hounsi. Other servitors hurriedly brought out a white sheet and spread it on the ground. A chair and a table were set upon the sheet, and Stephan was placed in the chair, where he now sat with his head hanging limply on his chest.

Stephan had been mounted by Ézilie Fréda, the deity of whiteness and 796
purity. That was why he was protected from the earth by the white sheet 787
beneath him. While the drums continued to beat, the hounsi placed upon 793
the table a bottle of wine, a clean glass, and a white plate with boiled maize [794]
meal, topped by a whole egg. Then they held over Stephan—who had be- [776]
come, for the time being, Ézilie—a second white sheet. The possessed houngan began to bend forward and back with great rapidity, toward the surface of the table and back to an upright position, his arms hanging quietly downward. The hounsi fluttered the covering sheet in such a way that the spectators could not see what was going on beneath it. In less than a minute, Stephan's movements ceased. The sheet was removed. Stephan sat limply, talking *langage*. In the white dish only the broken shells of the egg and a small portion of the meal remained. Some of the wine was gone from the upright bottle. The glass still had a little wine in the bottom. Ézilie had accepted the sacrifice. Not once had Stephan's hands changed from their hanging position or approached the table. The eggshells themselves were clean, but a tiny trickle of liquid yolk ran from the corner of Stephan's mouth. The visiting houngan rattled his asson before Stephan, who arose wearily, with the help of the hounsi, and followed him through the door into the hounfor.

Again there was dancing, and a little while later Stephan emerged from the hounfor in a bizarre military costume of red velvet, wearing black glasses, a blue military cap with a red feather, and a sword. He was almost as weird as the effigy of Gèdé that stood outside. The houngan had now become St. Jacques Majeur, or Ogoun, the loa of war and the forge. His personality had undergone a dramatic change. Strictly speaking, Stephan was not in a trance as he had been a little earlier. He was in control of his movements, which were completely conscious, and yet he was certainly not in a "normal" state of mind. Previously Stephan had been in a state of possession; now, one might say, he was in a state of obsession. He had identified himself with St. Jacques. He strode and swaggered like St. Jacques. His bearing was regal, military, and awesome. His costume should have seemed funny, like similar costumes seen during Mardi Gras days, but instead it was unworldly and impressive.

He carried a rum bottle in his hand, and he moved through the gathering making people drink from it. Those who drank from the bottle were sharing with St. Jacques. Stephan poured more rum into an iron pot on
the ground and set it afire. The hounsi kanzo, the servitors of the higher [794]
order who had been through the fire ordeal, came forward and washed their hands and arms with the burning rum, so that at times their whole arms were aflame, until they quickly snuffed the fire out. Some of the hounsi brought their children forward and washed their arms in the burn-

796 ing rum also, as a foretaste of the kanzo rites they might one day go
787 through.
793 There was dancing again for others besides the hounsi. The tension had
[794] passed. The ceremony was over, and the rest of the night was simply for pleasure.

776

GÈDÉ NIMBO, THE "DEAD" LOA

Gèdé Nimbo, also known as Baron Samedi, is one of the most powerful deities of the Haitian pantheon. He guards the cemetery and protects the graves, especially those of children. But Gèdé Nimbo is not simply another loa, he is a personification of death. Like death, he is given to whim. He is an intruder. He forces his way into services being held for other deities, behaves badly, and has to be wheedled to depart. He indulges in ribald humor when the mood strikes him, and the most solemn occasions are likely to be disturbed by his pranks. Gèdé Nimbo can be formidable when aroused, as he can be gentle and forbearing when it suits him.

Gèdé is always dressed in black, usually with a tail coat and top hat. He is always represented in this attire in the shrines where effigies of him are to be found. Elsie Clews Parsons, a number of years ago, reported this Haitian description of Gèdé:

> He is a *grande diable*. He makes all kinds of motions to make you laugh, but you must not laugh at him, for if you do he makes you "stop laughing" . . . Anything you touch, he takes and never returns, and you have to give him more and more. He smokes cigarettes, not cigars. He wears a coat and a hat, and carries a stick. He can make himself short or . . . as tall as a mast.[3]

The kind of motions Gèdé makes would in certain other cultures be regarded as obscenities. In Haiti they are merely public violations of social restraints and taboos, things no Haitian would think of doing in public view. But Gèdé, the loa of the graveyard, has special prerogatives. He does not fear criticism. He flouts propriety at will, he embarrasses, provokes, and insults with impunity.

776 At a Nago ceremony which I witnessed near Port-au-Prince, the strong-
787 hold of the Gèdé cult, Gèdé Nimbo entered with such gusto that he virtu-
796 ally made a shambles of the service. The first person to be mounted by the loa was the laplace, the houngan's understudy. He stiffened, twisted, jerked, and thrashed about. As the more violent phase of his possession wore off, he began to make lascivious loin movements, as though copulating with the center post. Afterward, he moved about, shaking hands and greeting various persons with insulting remarks calculated to make others laugh at the indignities. Stopping before a distinguished-looking spectator, Gèdé made a few loin movements in his direction. Grasping another man by the hands, he greeted him vigorously and inquired whether it was

[3] [Parsons, Spirit Cult in Hayti. Cf. p. 351, Cat. 16:--Analyst].

his *zozo* (penis) to which his glasses were affixed. As the dance pro- 776
gressed, the possessions came rapidly. The possessed persons, men and 787
women alike, leaped about the tonnelle, mimicking copulation. They 796
broke drinking glasses on the ground, threw themselves upon the drummers, and careened and crashed into spectators and dancers. In the course of the service there were nearly twenty possessions—all of them noteworthy for their portrayal of Gèdé Nimbo as a loa who has contempt for proprieties. For he is the spirit of the cemetery, the one who laughs last and best.

Near the mountain town of Kenskoff I saw another service for Gèdé,
which showed a different aspect of the loa of the graveyard. It took place [793]
inside the hut of a rural houngan, who was conducting the affair for his own immediate family and a few close friends. The hut itself was small. Its single room had been partitioned into two by hanging a sheet in the middle. On one side of the sheet a young child was lying on a mat next to the carefully stored Arada drums. On the other side the ceremony was taking place. Great bouquets of red flowers were arranged in a corner; above them hung a colored lithograph of the Christ child; below, on the floor, was a crude oil lamp with a floating wick. The floor area was no more than seven feet square, but at least twelve persons were crowded there, and others clustered in the doorway. Ritual flags leaned against the wall, one of red silk with a gold fringe, another of white silk with blue polka dots. A tiny space remained in the center of the floor for the houngan, whose "possession" by Gèdé was the feature of the service.

The houngan was dressed in a black stovepipe hat, a blue blouse with 776
white polka dots, and a black skirt over black trousers. In his hand he 787
carried a walking stick. He smoked a pipe constantly, a variation of the 796
customary cigarette. In the tiny space in the center of the room, the 793
houngan—or, more properly, Gèdé Nimbo—danced. The houngan's personality had changed—his voice, his postures, all his mannerisms. He spoke only through his nose, for that is the way Gèdé talks, as though he had a cleft palate.

He whirled around and around, singing and talking *langage* in turn.
His family sang: [539]

Gèdé-vi yo wè agó-é!
Gèdé-vi yo wè!
Papa Gèdé c'est loa!

It is Gèdé-vi they see, *agó-é!* *
It is Gèdé-vi they see!
Papa Gèdé is a *loa!*

---

* *Agoé* exclamatory, signifying "I am here."

776 787 793 796 He was the center of all eyes. Most of the time he danced alone, gyrating recklessly. Sometimes he danced with his houngénicon. Those who watched clapped hands and uttered sounds imitating drums, for drums were not being used in this service. The houngan carried the inevitable *clochette,* or tiny hand bell.

[535] When newcomers arrived, Gèdé greeted them by shaking both their hands downward, vigorously, three times. Then he wiped their faces with his kerchief, a ceremony which he repeated from time to time. He danced with each of them a kind of Jenvalo step, simple, restrained, and dignified. One of the visitors fell to his knees to converse with him.

The entire evening was built around the houngan's representation of Gèdé. Properly speaking, the houngan was not in a trance. He was in full possession of all his normal faculties and was conscious of the slightest inconveniences and disturbances. Several times the clay bowl of his pipe fell from the reed stem, scattering hot ashes on the ground, and each time he paused to allow the houngénicon to clear them away. Yet he was carried away by his certainty that he was Gèdé. The obvious conviction of those who watched seemed to fortify him in his role. As the evening wore on, he became more and more detached from his normal personality. His psychic condition was not that of one who had been "mounted" by a loa; it was, rather, a continuously progressive ecstasy.

776 761 Gèdé is, in fact, more than a loa of the cemetery; he is a personification of death in all its macabre, humorous, and unpredictable aspects. Death is not merely a thing dying; it is an entity, a positive force in nature. Death is Gèdé Nimbo. I believe that when the houngan became Gèdé, all who had crowded into his hut felt themselves to be in the presence of death itself. Death, a dynamic, aggressive force, danced and pirouetted among them, talking the language of the dead and of old Africa.

776 Gèdé is often stern, austere, and forbidding, but he has other aspects. Haitians take amused pleasure at the terror he can strike into the hearts of the mighty. An old Gèdé song goes:

[539]

Papa Gèdé bel ga'çon!	Papa Gèdé is a handsome fellow!
Papa Gèdé bel ga'çon!	Papa Gèdé is a handsome fellow!
L'habillé tout en noi'!	He is dressed all in black
Pou'l monté au palais!	For he is going up to the palace!
L'habillé tout en blanc	When he's dressed all in white
Li semblé yun deputé!	He looks like a deputy!
L'habillé tout en noi'!	When he's dressed all in black
Li semblé yun senateur!	He resembles a senator!

776 788 173 539 According to tradition, the song had its origin in a march on the capital by some houngans many years ago. The story is very old and no one remembers many of the details.

remembers many of the details. But during the administration of President 000
Louis Borno (1922–1930) there was a reënactment of the original march. 776
There suddenly appeared in the streets of Port-au-Prince a crowd of Gèdé 788
mystères—houngans "possessed" by Gèdé Nimbo and attired in Gèdé 643
dress: tall black hats, long black tail coats, smoked glasses, black skirts 175
over their black trousers. They carried flags, waved polka-dot kerchiefs, shook their ceremonial rattles, and paused sometimes to wipe the perspiration from one another's faces. They became the nucleus of a huge, noisy crowd moving up the hill toward the palace. Market women followed instead of going home; street gamins screamed and raced among them. Before they had arrived at the palace grounds they had taken on the semblance of a huge Mardi Gras band. They swerved through the gates of the palace grounds and along the drive, right to the steps of the palace itself. The guards, taken by surprise, waited helplessly for their officers to arrive.

At the palace door, the houngans demanded money from the president. Borno was in a dilemma. He was reputed to be sympathetic to Vodoun ritual but was only surreptitiously so. He feared the houngans, and he feared public opinion. What would the upper class of Port-au-Prince think, the Latin-culture Haitians? With Gèdé's worst manners, the Gèdé mystères cavorted on the palace steps. Finally Borno gave in. He sent the money out to them, and then the crowd of Gèdés marched out of the palace grounds, waving their flags and shaking their rattles.

SERVICE FOR THE HOUNSI BOSSALE

This ritual of calling the loa to speak through the mouth of the Vodoun 346
priest took place in the Bolosse section of Port-au-Prince. The hounfor was 796
situated in a congested slum area of the city, but the grounds around it 787
were spacious. The hounfor itself was small and unpretentious, and except for the adjoining tonnelle would easily have been mistaken for
another small wooden house. The houngan was a heavy-set man with a 793
black mustache. Quick to laugh and easy in his movements, he neverthe- 794
less commanded solemn respect from the hounsi and the other partici- 796
pants. His soft-spoken voice expressed assurance and authority. 787

There were a number of possessions in the course of the dancing, all more or less routine. Each time a possession occurred, the houngan came forward with his asson and bell, gave a pitcher of water and a candle to the possessed devotee, and conducted her through a ritual at the foot of the center post.

Later, one of the hounsi came and sat at the houngan's feet. She was not possessed but obviously was in a state of high tension. Other servitors brought from the hounfor a wooden washtub and set it on the ground

793 before the houngan. Staring into the tub, he shook his asson and called
794 upon a certain loa to enter. Then he placed a lighted candle upright in the
796 tub and watched it for a moment. The flame was suddenly snuffed out.
787 The houngan looked concerned. He removed the candle and called for another one. When he placed the new candle in the tub it remained burning. The houngan smiled. The loa had agreed to enter. The houngan and his chief assistant placed the tub upon the head of the waiting hounsi. She trembled violently as though she had received a shock, then leaped to her feet. The loa had mounted her and presumably was sitting in the tub on her head. She began to stagger back and forth across the dance court, while the drums beat a salute. The tub tottered dangerously but did not fall. The possessed hounsi then began to whirl. She stopped, and the tub continued to spin for a few seconds on her head. She twirled again in the opposite direction. Each time she stopped she waited for the tub to stop spinning. The twirling motion was accompanied by a constant jerking and lurching, as though she were about to lose her balance, but she never stumbled or fell. After perhaps five minutes of this violent "riding" by the loa, the houngan approached her with his asson and conducted her into the hounfor, the tub still on her head. Inside the hounfor he removed the tub, sent the loa away, and left the hounsi to rest.

[346] There was more dancing, and after a while the service was transferred to a small temporary cloth-covered structure resembling an American Indian hogan. The hounsi bossale—the servitors whose loa had not been "tamed" or conditioned—lay before the structure on their faces, side by side. There were twelve of them. The other hounsi covered them completely with white sheets. The houngan entered the hogan-like structure (the *card*) with a candle and a bell. He tinkled his bell and began to call upon the loa to speak to the hounsi bossale. Through his mouth, first one spirit and then another made comments. The hounsi under the sheets were tensely quiet, until one of them began to jerk and scream. Several others, as though responding to a trigger, joined in the screaming. Older women came to quiet them. The hysterical reaction of the hounsi bossale was regarded as simply a reflection of their beginners' status. Their loa had not yet been controlled. The ritual continued until the early hours of the morning, the loa and ancient ancestors coming in to speak, one after another.

244

THE FIRST YAMS AND THE FIRST RICE

[796] Each year, when the yams are harvested there is a great festival known as
the *mangé yam*. Of all things grown in Haiti, the yam is perhaps the most
[262] significant. It is the most vital of all staples, and it is traditional. The yam

celebrated with elaborate rituals for the dead. As in Haiti, great impor- 243
tance is laid on the presence of all living descendants, whose numbers are 244
calculated to influence the ancestors' behavior. And as in Haiti, the first 796
yams and the first rice are offered to the dead, and only after the family 769
ritual does the family divide the crop.[5] 171

SERVICE FOR THE ASSOTOR DRUM

The *assotor* drum is the largest and most sacred of all Haitian drums. 534
Around it is built an impressive and elaborate service known as the *mangé* 796
assotor, which, according to local traditions and circumstances, may be 778
held as often as every three years or as infrequently as every twenty-one years. The period between mangés always consists of an odd number of years. A houngan from Jérémie declared the service might properly be held every three, five, or seven years. Another cult priest in the Cul-de-Sac Plain said it could be held every seven, seventeen, or twenty-one years. The assotor is known as the *plus grand moune* (the most venerable "man") of the hounfor. However, few cult centers possess an assotor. "Assotor c'est fort bagaille, c'est pas zaffai tout moune" (The assotor is powerful, it isn't everybody's affair), Haitians say. This is what a man from Jérémie tells about it:

"The assotor is the greatest of all things in the hounfor. The Rada drums 534
are only for the Dahomey nation. The Congo drums are for the Congo 796
nation. The assotor is a man of Dahomey, but he is for all nations. It is 778
for all loa—Pétro, Congo, Bumba, Dahomey. The assotor belongs to 184
Dahomey, but when there is a great service the assotor is the host to the 787
loa of every rite, the loa of Haiti and of Africa. When the assotor is played, [776]
the loa are awakened everywhere. Loa who have been forgotten by the Creoles (Haitians) will come to the service and mount people, and when the loa have gone, many people don't know what loa has been riding them. Some ancient spirits from far away come only to the assotor service, and when it is over they aren't heard of again.

"The assotor drum is not for small things, it is for great occasions. For 534
some people there are no occasions in their whole lives great enough for 796
an assotor service. When all other things have failed, it is only then that 778
the assotor is called upon. 787

"If a big houngan should have an assotor drum, he can have only one, and it is the chief of the hounfor. All other drums are its servants. You can make an assotor, but it is not necessarily an assotor. It may look like an assotor and not be an assotor. To be an assotor it must not only have the shape of an assotor but it must be accepted by the loa. There was a houngan near Jérémie who made an assotor and held a great service with it,

---

[5] [Informant: Albert Kofi Prempeh, Ghana. Cf. p. 351, category 116. -- Analyst] [115]

534 796 778 ● 787 but it wasn't a genuine assotor and the loa didn't come. The drummer beat the assotor, but none of the loa came. As he played, the stick kept falling out of his hand. This was a bad signal (omen). None of the people got loa in their heads. The houngan was in a great sweat, but nothing happened. Another houngan came after the third day and told him to bring the service to an end. He did that. They threw the false assotor away and no one would touch it.

534 796 778 782 787 (776) "To make an assotor, there is first a service. The houngan goes into the woods to find a great tree that is suitable. The trunk must be big enough so that the drum is at least as tall as a man. Most assotors are six feet high or more. The houngan must buy the tree from Maît' Grand Bois, the loa who is Master of the Forest. There is a service under the tree, a goat or a bull is killed, and the houngan places money on the ground for Maît' Grand Bois. Then Maît' Grand Bois mounts his horses. He enters the head of the houngénicon or the laplace. Sometimes he rides the houngan himself. He is very rough with his horses. But if he accepts the money, the houngan has the tree cut down, and he has an assotor drum made. When the drum is finished, a special stick must be made to beat it. Again they go to the woods. They carry the great assotor drum with them. There is singing but no dancing or drumming. They find a tree from which they will cut the drumstick, and there is a service. The houngan must buy the branch from which the drumstick will be made. He offers money to Maît' Grand Bois, the same as before. He spills a little water on the ground for Maît' Grand Bois. He holds a candle in his hand. They sing to Maît' Grand Bois to let them have the stick. Maît' Grand Bois is the master of all the trees, but he is thinking also of the other loa and how they feel about it. On the Island Below the Water he consults with them. If he agrees to give the stick, he makes it known by mounting some of the hounsi, or the houngan, or maybe the man who will be the special assotor drummer. Then they cut down the branch and make the drumstick.

534 778 776 "The assotor drum is not dedicated to Ogoun or Ézilie or any other single loa. If it is baptized, it is given its own name, Assotor. The spirit of the assotor is multiple, for it is the *rappel* for all loa everywhere. The spirit of the assotor is called Assotor, and it is a kind of loa, but it is not one loa but all loa.

534 796 778 776 "In the assotor service, all loa come. Ogoun, Damballa, Legba, Tijean Pétro, Dan Pétro, Gèdé, Maît' Cimitière, they all come. The big loa come and the little loa, the chiefs and their escortes. Every big loa has an escorte of twenty-one smaller loa. Some of the smaller loa have their own escortes. Damballa comes crawling like a snake. Makanda comes crawling like a snake. Ogoun comes fighting, chewing on nails or anything iron. Badé

184 the gate, and the crossroads, is not regarded in the same light as the other
776 loa but as a messenger and interceder, and as the crossroads protector. He
it is who helps in the placation of the major gods, and who guards
people against accident, chance, and evil spirits on the highway.

796 In traditional form, services for Mait' Grand Bois and Femme Grand
782 Bois are conducted by the family without the aid of a houngan, under
776 the direction of the oldest male member of the family. The rites begin
on a Thursday. With a tiny bell in his hand, the elder who directs
the service (he is called *grand famille*) calls upon Mait' Grand Bois to
come and receive his feast. The procedures are solemn. The grand
● [787] famille and the family sing. At last Grand Bois enters the head of the
old man who is conducting the rites. Then the sacrificial animals are
brought forward and killed, and the women take the meat and begin the
cooking of the mangé. While the food is cooking, the family sits and
waits. Sometimes the grand famille begins a song, in which others join.
The cooking takes a long while. Sometime during the night, when
the food is ready, it is placed in two baskets—one for Mait' Grand Bois
and one for his wife, Femme Grand Bois. Into each basket goes meat,
corn meal, rice, bread, cookies, peanut cakes, cassava, and other delicacies.
The two baskets are hung by ropes from the roof of the tonnelle, or from
the branch of a tree. During the entire night, none of the family eats.
Mâit' Grand Bois and his wife partake of the feast as they please. At six
o'clock in the morning, the baskets are taken down, and the family is
free to eat what the loa have left for them.

When the food is gone, the bones that are left are carried to a nearby
stream and washed until they are white and shining. The bones are
then placed in a large calabash bowl. Sweet-scented leaves from special
trees are placed in the bowl with the bones, and water is added. The
[783] mixture becomes a ritual lotion, or "bath." The entire family kneels
before the liquid, which they rub on their faces, heads, arms, hands, legs,
and feet. When the ritual bathing is over, they sing:

[539] La famille vin' payé sang,	The family comes to pay blood,
La famille vin' payé sang,	The family comes to pay blood,
Cérémonie là c'est fini! [Ex. 41]	The ceremony is finished!

Afterward, each member of the family places a small coin in the calabash
dish with the bones and leaves, and the residue is then buried in a deep
hole at a crossroads. A heavy post (*borne*) is erected at the site, with
[211] markings to indicate the date of the service, and the numbers 1, 2, 3, 4,
each representing a year. Every year one of the numbers is checked off,
and at the end of four years another service for Mait' Grand Bois and
Femme Grand Bois is held.

If it should happen that on the appointed day four years later the 796
family is unable to hold the regular feast for Grand Bois, the grand 782
famille goes to the tree sacred to the loa, with a bottle of *siro'* and other 776
token gifts. He explains the difficulties of the family; he tells the loa [778]
that it has been a bad year, that the crops have been poor, and that the
family has not been able to accumulate enough money to buy sacrificial
animals. He asks Grand Bois for a six-month postponement. The loa [787]
agrees to the postponement, making his intentions clear through various
signs when the grand famille is possessed. "Grand Bois is a good loa,"
people say, "but if you fail to meet your obligations to him he will be
very stern. If you don't keep your promise to him, he may seize you
[i.e., kill you]."

When the rites for Mait' Grand Bois are finished, services for Ogoun
and the Dahomé deities may be held, beginning on Friday and running
through the week end. The Ogoun service is a festive affair. There is
much singing and dancing, and early on Saturday morning the sacrificial
bull is dressed and decorated with red and blue kerchiefs. Red and
blue ribbons are tied to his horns, and he is led on a grand tour to
various places, including Ogoun's tree. The drummers walk behind [787]
him, and after them members of the family, some dancing, some sing-
ing, and some mounted by the loa Ogoun. The procession passes three
times around the cemetery, then heads back toward the family *habitation*.
When the participants reach the tree sacred to Legba, they sing to this
loa, invoking him to "ouvri bayè pou' moin" (open the gate for me).
Finally, when the procession reaches the *habitation*, the sacrificial bull
is killed. After Ogoun has been served his mangé, the rites are terminated
with an *action de grâce*.

Near Anse-à-Veau there is a dried-up spring. It is said that many 173-
years ago during a big service for Mait' Grand Bois a man mounted by 796
this loa rushed to the foot of a large tree and began clawing at the 776
ground. He dug a hole there with his hands, and when it was only 782
a few feet deep, water began to flow. The members of the société later [787]
enlarged the hole and lined it with stone. It was discovered that a giant
crab was living in this water. One year, a service to Mait' Grand Bois
was missed. The crab disappeared from the spring, and soon the water
stopped flowing. "Grand Bois gives," the people say, "but if he is not
remembered he also takes back."

POSSESSION BY THE LOA PINGA MAZA

On the outskirts of Port-au-Prince there is a hounfor dedicated to the 776
loa Pinga Maza, also known by the name Bakulu Baka. He is a ferocious [346]
and fearsome spirit of the Pétro family who is known for his propensity

houngan took his place before the small altar and the cross surmounted by the skull. Again he spoke *langage* and rattled his asson. He took from the altar a small-necked bottle containing a white alcoholic liquid and a tight-fitting iron cross. The presence of the iron cross inside the bottle was represented as a magical phenomenon. The houngan took a mouthful of the white liquid and sprayed it out in a fine mist over the skull. Twice more he sprayed the mist, in different directions. Then he poured a little of the liquid directly on the skull. The room was filled with the smell of alcohol. The houngan lighted a candle and sat in a low chair facing the altar. He shook his asson rhythmically and spoke *langage* to Pinga Maza. Suddenly Pinga Maza entered the houngan's head. The houngan became violent. He jerked this way and that, making strange noises in his throat. He seized a machete from the altar, waved it around, and struck the flat of it against his head. He continued for a while to beat his head fiercely with the machete. Gradually he became quiet. His assistants placed Pinga's red jacket on him. Now he spoke in the tired voice of an old man. He complained that he was hungry, that he had not eaten for a long while. His assistant handed him a razor blade. He placed it in his mouth, chewed it up, and swallowed it, washing it down with more of the white liquid in the bottle. He asked for more, and they gave him a second blade to eat. He demanded a third, and ate that, too, spitting out small fragments of steel that caught in his teeth. 793 755 793 755 787 ● [789]

His assistant told him there was a man present seeking advice about a pouin. The possessed houngan looked around with half-closed eyes. He asked the man his name, and what he wanted. After hearing the client's story, the houngan took out a deck of cards and placed them one at a time, face up, on a winnowing tray. After studying the cards he said: "You are strong, but not strong enough. You already have some protections, but they do not protect you from the dangers coming your way. You have powerful enemies. You must have a new pouin." The man said yes, he wanted a new pouin, but how much would it cost? Pinga replied through the mouth of the houngan: "Twenty-five dollars." The man said: "I will get the money and return." He went out after placing five gourdes on the winnowing tray with the cards. Pinga became drowsy. The houngan's head fell forward on his chest and he slept. The divining session was ended.

THE WATER ROAD

The land where the loa live, the place "below the water," is not thought of as being in the water itself. It is dry and airy, like the countryside of Haiti. But the route to it is through water. 776 772

000 772 776 823 778 of Haiti. But the route to it is through water. When the Haitians say "under the water" they do not mean under the sea. The ocean is regarded as the special domain of Agwé, La Sirène, and a few related deities, but it has nothing to do with most loa. "Under the water" specifically means under the springs, the rivers, and the fresh-water lakes. Fresh water has the greatest of significance in relation to most of the Vodoun deities.

When a loa comes to visit his Haitian children he comes by way of the *chimin dleau* (the water road)—that is to say, by way of the river, the waterfall, or the spring. Because the spring is the primary source of fresh water, it is the most direct means of contact with the land of the loa. Tales are heard everywhere of persons who, drawing water from the spring at night, heard the voices of loa or the sound of singing and drumming coming up from somewhere below. And virtually all the tales about human beings who visited the land of the loa describe them as descending into a river or disappearing into a waterfall.

The loa are accustomed to traveling by the "water road." And in all aspects of the Vodoun service, this "water road" is refreshed and replenished. When the road is dry, contact with the loa is diminished. When it is moist, the loa travel easily.

776 782 823 778 Thus, the houngan constantly uses water to entice and invite the deities. He holds a glass or pitcher of water at the center pole of his peristyle. He extends it toward the four cardinal points. He spills water at the foot of the center pole. He spills water in the hounfor at the foot of the *pé,* or altar. He sets a pitcher of water at the gateway of his *habitation.* And often, during a service, he pours a pathway of water in the dust from his gateway into his peristyle. Within nearly [346] every hounfor there is at least one *bassin,* or pool, dedicated to the loa who is the *malt' caille,* the master of the house. These pools are carefully filled with water drawn from the springs. They are places of rest and refreshment for the deities whose names or portraits are inscribed on the walls above.

796 778 823 [788] [787] Sometimes rites and services are held at the site of the spring, the houngan and his entourage marching down to it from the hounfor for the occasion. So, too, there are annual pilgrimages to waterfalls such as Saut d'Eau, where the loa mount their "horses" in profusion.

782 796 823 778 Within the hounfor, during a service, the cult priest and the servitors pour "libations" of water on the earth, so that the loa may be refreshed. And virtually without end, the hounfor is the scene of ritual ceremonies in which the loa is bathed and thus "renewed" in the heads of his servitors.*

*[For footnote, see category 116, P. 351.--Analyst]

The importance of water in Vodoun has a fundamentally West African 171
character. Among the Yoruba and the Ashanti and in Dahomey, for 771
example, water rites are a significant aspect of religious ritual. Herskovits 823
notes the frequency of religious pilgrimages to streams in West 796
Africa. 778

> In one instance, at Abeokuta, a bedecked procession of worshipers left a shrine atop a high hill, followed a long path to the riverside over two miles away, and returned before the ceremonies could be carried out at the shrine of the god. On one occasion, in Dahomey, the bed of the sacred stream run dry was "filled" from nearby wells so that this water could be ritually redrawn for use in an especially important ceremony. Among the Ashanti, pilgrimages to Lake Bosumtwe and other sacred bodies of water regularly occur. And it is on such occasions that the spirit of the river or lake or sea manifests itself, by "entering the head" of the devotee and causing him to fling himself, possibly possessed, into the water.[8]

So it is also in Haiti, where possession at the river's edge may cause 823
the devotee to leap into the river. At Saut d'Eau, possessed persons 787
plunge into the waterfall without regard for their safety, being in the 778
care of the loa who have mounted them.

Into this water complex the Christian rite of baptism has been easily 177
absorbed, providing merely a new act of veneration for water and its 797
properties. In the Haitian mind baptism is not far removed from the 823
lavé tête ritual, the washing of the head, or the *rafraîchi tête*, the "refreshing" 778
of the head, both of which are acts in propitiation of the 782
loa.[9] So related is the baptismal concept in the Haitian mind, that the 795
term "baptize" is used to describe the lavé tête; it is said that the loa is 851
being "baptized." So also are drums "baptized," not to menton yams, and
even the hounfor itself.

Marriage to a Loa

Although the term *hounsi* (spirit wife, or wife of the spirit) is applied [588
to a large class of servitors of the Vodoun temple, only a small number [794]
of servitors ever pass through rites which give them a husband-wife or wife-husband relationship with a loa. Reasons for these mystic marriages vary, but usually the rituals take place upon the prescription of a cult priest who interprets the will of the deities concerned. Most of the mystic marriages of which I have heard have taken place in the general area of Port-au-Prince and the Cul-de-Sac Plain. In some other areas of Haiti it appears that no such rites have taken place locally within the memory of the elder inhabitants. One aged man living near Belladère declared: "It [marriage to a loa] is impossible. People serve loa, they do not marry them. A man does not marry his burro. A loa

[8] [Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past*, p. 233. Cf. p. 351, category 116. --Analyst]

[9] [It is of interest to note the perseverance of traditional attitudes toward water rites in certain negro cults in the United States. River baptism often is attended by ecstatic seizures in familiar form. Cf. p. 351, category 116. --Analyst]

588 does not marry his horse. People marry people. Loa marry loa. A man
588 may have a compact with a loa. That is not a marriage. Some of the
184 things that are going on down there in the Plain are not right. They
are not the old way. In the old days we did things differently. We did not always run to the houngan. The grand famille knew how to talk to the loa. Up here we don't do things the way they do them down below in the city. People marry people. Loa marry loa."

588 Nevertheless, the practice in the neighborhood of Port-au-Prince and
776 the Cul-de-Sac Plain is for mystic marriages to take place when deemed
[184] useful, essential, or unavoidable. Foremost among the loa involved in
these rites is Ezilie Wèdo, the "pure" one, the deity of love, sometimes identified with the Virgin Mary. Other loa known to have taken part in mystic marriages are Damballa, Ogoun, Ayida, Agwé, Gèdé Nimbo or one of his brothers, Cousin Zaka, and Général Clermeil. All these loa—significantly, I think—have clearly defined personalities; much is known about their character and behavior, their likes and dislikes.

588 A man married to Ezilie has special obligations to her for the duration of his life. On certain days (especially Thursday, which is sacred to
[834] this deity), the mortal "husband" may not have sexual intercourse, even though he has a human wife.

588 Circumstances leading to a mystic marriage vary widely, but in each
755 case it is a cult priest who determines whether the rites should be
793 held. Perhaps a person has been afflicted with a series of illnesses or mis-
776 fortunes. He goes to his houngan, who begins a series of communications with the client's loa or with his own. Sometimes many loa are consulted before the desired information is available. Eventually it is determined that a certain deity, for reasons which may or may not
[753] be clear, wishes to have nuptial ties with the client. The illnesses or mis-
[777] fortunes that have been sent are a means of informing or warning the person concerned.

Sometimes the houngan relies on well-established divining methods to ascertain the cause of the difficulties. He may employ the *gembo* (a shell that slides on a string), ashes, or small shells that are thrown on
● [787] the ground. Or he may rely on possession by a loa to provide the information.

If it is found that a loa is demanding marriage, arrangements are then made. The rites that follow may take place in a hounfor or at the house of the human bride or groom. Both a prêt' savane and a houngan officiate.

588 The person directly involved, like the loa, usually has something to
554 gain from a mystic marriage. For one thing, he can reasonably expect

special future help and consideration from the loa (including the cessa- 588
tion of the illnesses or other misfortunes that have led to the marriage). 554
A man (or woman) united with a loa in "matrimony" is "stronger" (*plus fort*) in his relationship to his environment and to other people. For this reason, the initiative for a mystic marriage does not always come from a loa. An ambitious person may seek such a marriage to strengthen his hand, to provide protection against other deities or human enemies, or to gain wealth or position. One observer, Odette Mennesson Rigaud, expresses the opinion that in such instances the marriage "is no longer a religious union of mystic love, but a magic pact."[10] The implicit element of "pact" is so evident in all mystic marriages, even when the initiative comes from the loa, that the distinction is not easily appreciated. However, persons suspected of "pushing" for a marriage with a loa are regarded as presumptuous or reckless, and often they are believed to have hidden motives. It is felt by many that the benefits of such a union can be only temporary and that catastrophe will ultimately follow.

A human party to marriage with a loa is deeply committed. He is 588
subject to jealousy and anger on the part of his mystic mate. His be- 782
havior in the hounfor as in his daily life must be beyond the loa's re- 787
proach. He must avoid possession by other loa. And he must fulfill endless obligations. Sometimes the prospect of such binding ties is more than a man (or woman) is ready to face, and through the intercession of a strong houngan the loa may be induced to withdraw his demand for marriage. In that event, a special service is held, in the course of which the person buys his freedom with promises of special gifts and feasts for the deity.

One young man I knew was caught in a special dilemma—the houngan 159
and the loa on one side, the Protestant Church on the other. The man, 588
named Maurice, came from the mountains near Léogane. He was 753
married but had no children. His wife's family, still living in Léogane, was Protestant. Maurice himself was a follower of Vodoun, and nominally a Catholic. When his wife was afflicted with a long series of headaches and earaches, Maurice consulted a houngan of Port-au-Prince. The houngan said that the loa Ayida Wèdo was demanding marriage with Maurice, and that the wife's illnesses were an indication of jealousy.

At the same time, the wife's parents came from Léogane and insisted that the girl's illnesses were brought about by God because Maurice was a follower of Vodoun. They demanded that he sever all his connections with Vodoun and become a Protestant.

After considerable anxiety, Maurice "purged" himself of Vodoun and [783]

[10] [Odette Mennesson Rigaud, "Notes on Two Marriages with Voudoun 'Loa'," in Appendix A of Deren, *Divine Horsemen*, p. 264. Cf. p. 351, category 116. -- Analyst]

533
539
776
794

There is a loa who lives in the water,
It is Damballa!
Papa Damballa is the spring!
Papa Damballa is the spring!

Ayida Wèdo, another aspect of Damballa, is also known as a snake and a rainbow. A song describing Ayida's attributes goes:

Ayida c'est arc-en-ciel oh!	Ayida is a rainbow, oh!
Ou ap' vin' fai coulève!	You will come in like a snake!
Ayida c'est arc-en-ciel!	Ayida is a rainbow!
Pas wè m'ap fai coulève? [Ex. 47]	Don't you see I come in as a snake?

Agwé Woyo, one of the major deities of the sea, is believed to be responsible for thunder over the ocean, which is described as the sound of his cannon shooting:

Malt' Agwé so'ti nan la mer,
Canon'm chargé-é!
Malt' Agwé so'ti nan la mer,
Canon'm chargé!
Malt' Agwé so'ti nan la mer,
Canon'm chargé oh!
Canon'm chargé pou'm tiré Malt' A'Woyo! [Ex. 48]

Master Agwé comes from the sea,
My cannon is loaded!
Master Agwé comes from the sea,
My cannon is loaded!
Master Agwé comes from the sea,
My cannon is loaded, oh!
My cannon is loaded to fire, Master Agwé Woyo!

The loa Kitta, or Simbi Kitta, of the Guinée pantheon is one of the water deities. He is described as coming out of the water dripping wet:

Kitta oh so'ti nan dleau li tou' mouillé!
Oh Kitta oh so'ti nan dleau li tou' mouillé!
Oh Kitta so'ti nan dleau li tou' mouillé!
Oh nan point houngan passé Bondieu nan payo-yà! [Ex. 37]

Kitta, oh, comes out of the water, he is all wet!
Oh, Kitta, oh, comes out of the water, he is all wet!
Oh, Kitta comes out of the water, he is all wet!
Oh, there is no houngan in this country greater than God!

Tijean Pétro of the Pétro "nation" is small, and agile even though he has only one foot. (Some people say that Tijean Petro has no feet at all.) This somewhat malevolent deity hides in the leaves of the coconut palm, and from there he sometimes preys on passers-by, particularly children. Persons mounted by Tijean Pétro may move about as though they have no feet and climb into the nearest palm tree. [787]

533 539 776 782 794 796

Ogoun é oh moin blessé!	Ogoun é, oh, I am hurt!
Ogoun é oh moin blessé!	Ogoun é, oh, I am hurt!
A pou m'blessé Ferei,	Now I am hurt, Ferei,
M'pas wè sang moin!	I don't see my blood!
M'pas wè sang'm Mait Ogoun,	I don't see my blood, Master Ogoun,
Moin pas wè sang moin!	I don't see my blood!
M'pas wè sang'm Badagry,	I don't see my blood, Badagry
Moin pas wè sang moin là! [Ex. 62]	I don't see my blood here!

The loa Moundongue, like Dambala, likes goat meat, and it can be cooked in two ways:

Yé yé yé!
Moundongue oh!
Oh Moundongue oh yé yé yé!
Moundongue mangé cabrit bouilli,
Moundongue mangé cabrit boucané! [Ex. 63]

Yé yé yé!
Moundongue, oh!
Oh, Moundongue, oh, yé yé yé!
Moundongue eats boiled goat,
Moundongue eats roasted goat!

Or again, the servitors may sing:

Cote pasé na ba'ou mangé, oh Ti Moundongue oh!
Cote pasé na ba'ou mangé, Moundongue oh! [Ex. 64]

Wherever you are, we give you food, oh, Ti Moundongue there!
Wherever you are, we give you food, Moundongue there!

● [787] [788] [789] The loa Adja also has animal sacrifices and special dishes for his mangé, but sometimes he—and the "horses" he mounts—will eat broken glass:

Oh Adja mangé bounda dèmijan!
Adja vieu' vieu'!
Adja mangé bounda dèmijan!
Adja vieu' vieu'! [Ex. 65]

Oh, Adja eats the bottom of a bottle!
Adja, old one, old one!
Adja eats the bottom of a bottle!
Adja, old one, old one!

For the loa Ianman Ibo the proper sacrifice is a rooster, and the deity declares:

Nanchon Ibo m'ka mangé gros coq oh nanchon Ibo!
Nanchon Ibo m'ka mangé gros coq!
Nanchon Ibo m'ka mangé gros coq oh nanchon Ibo!
Waille waille waille! [Ex. 66]

Ibo nation, I am going to eat a large cock, oh, Ibo nation! 533 539
Ibo nation, I am going to eat a large cock! 776 784
Ibo nation, I am going to eat a large cock, oh, Ibo nation! 796 794
Waile waile waile! (782)

The Ibo service is often a strictly family affair rather than a broad community ritual. The family replies to the Ibo loa in the following song. [184]

La famille vin' payé sang,	The family comes to pay blood,
Vin' payé sang!	Comes to pay blood!
La famille vin' payé sang,	The family comes to pay blood,
Ibo Lazile volonté! [Ex. 41]	It is Ibo Lazile's wish!

The loa Nago frankly tells the people that if they want to come to his house (his shrine, or the houmfor) they will have to pay something for the privilege:

Si nous wè caï'm demeuré,	If you see where I live,
Si nous wè caï'm demeuré,	If you see where I live,
Fo'ou payé bonbon pou' ça!	You have to give cookies for that!
Anago Nago!	Anago Nago!
Vin' wè caï'm demeuré! [Ex. 67]	Come see where I live!

The "dead" spirit Gèdé Nimbo, the guardian or master of the cemetery, who often engages in bizarre activities which poke fun at the codes of social behavior, is sometimes regarded as a special protector of children. Precisely because he is overlord of all that has to do with the grave, his good will is sought, particularly in behalf of the young; and in many services of the Nago rites his protection is bought by money gifts: 776 782 796 794

Gèdé main la'gent, [539]
M'apé ba ou la'gent la'gent, [533]
M'apé ba ou la'gent pou' ga'dé zenfants la yo!
M'apé ba ou la'gent pou' ga'dé zenfants la yo!

Gèdé, take the money,
I will give you money, money,
I will give you money to guard the children!
I will give you money to guard the children!

In the course of the ceremonies when, from time to time, the honored loa of the occasion enters into the head of one of the servitors, the houngan will place in the hands of the mounted person a lighted candle and a pitcher of water. The possessed servitor approaches the sacred center post and spills a little water on the ground for the deity. After certain other rituals, the houngan, or one of his assistants, conducts the mounted "horse" into the houmfor to the altar. In the following song, as the possession comes on, there is a call for a lighted candle. 787 796 794 776 [533] [539]

787
796
794
776
533
539

Simbi non wè oh!
Simbi djab non wè!
Oh Simbi non wè oh!
Simbi non wè oh!
Simbi wa lumé chandelle pou' clairé moin! [Ex. 68]

Simbi doesn't see, oh!
Stern Simbi doesn't see!
Oh, Simbi doesn't see, oh!
Simbi doesn't see, oh!
Simbi [says] you will light the candle so I can see!

Some of the songs refer to the dancing of the loa who enter the bodies of the servitors. The deity Loko asks for his hounsi, through whom he will dance:

Coté pitits moin yo,
Mainain'm nan hounfor, m'ap djaillé!
Na pas Loko,
Coté pitits moin yo! [Ex. 69]

Where are my children,
Take me into the hounfor, I will *djaillé!*
Now, Loko,
Where are my children!

796
794
776
533
539

Another deity, who is not expressly named, tells his "leaves in the woods"—that is, his hounsi—that he has danced since he was a child:

Fé nan bois hélé moin!	Leaves in the woods call me!
Oh dépi'm pitit m'ap dansé!	Oh, since I was small I have danced!
Fé nan bois hé-é!	Leaves in the woods *hé-é!*
Fé nan bois hélé moin oh!	Leaves in the woods call me, oh!
Oh fé nan bois hélé moin oh!	Oh, leaves in the woods call me, oh!
Dépi'm pitit m'ap dansé!	Since I was small I have danced!
Fé nan bois hélé moin! [Ex. 70]	Leaves in the woods call me!

In the following song the loa Macaya Bumba is called upon by the hounsi to hurry up and get on with his dancing.

Macaya Bumba Bumba!	Macaya Bumba Bumba!
Lévé dansé!	Get up and dance!
Macaya Bumba!	Macaya Bumba!
Bumba mon cher vini dansé! [Ex. 71]	Bumba my dear, come and dance!

A song for the deity Ianman in the course of the Ibo dancing and ritual goes:

Ibo lélé!
Ibo lélé!
Nanchon Ibo ça ou gäinyain con ça Ibo lélé!

The loa Aïson complains more vigorously of the bad behavior of human beings: 533 539 776 626

Aïson Aïson!
Dipis temps y'ap pa'lé sou moin!
Coté ça yo gainyain?
Bouche à yo paya paya!
Djaule à yo pèné pèné!
Coté ça pou' yo pa'don oh? [Ex. 83]

Aïson, Aïson!
For a long time they have been talking about me!
What's wrong with them?
Their mouths go *paya paya!*
Their jaws go *pèné pèné!*
What is the excuse?

Even on routine business the loa are inclined to be petulant, or to protest that they have been mistreated, that their followers gossip about them, or that they are not ardent enough. Here the deity Simbi en des Eaux complains bitterly that she is not loved by her servitors, the "leaves in the woods," and asks a hounsi named Lolo for news to take to spirits of the ancestors who live "below the water": 533 539 776 626 794

Fé nan bois con ça nou yé!
Nen point raimain pas mandé quitté!
Fé nan bois con ça nou yé!
Nen point raimain pas mandé quitté!
Simbi en des Eaux,
Qui sorti en bas dleau!
Gardé ça yo fai moin!
M'dit Lolo, ba moin nouvelle pou'm ba yo! [Ex. 84]

Leaves in the woods, that's the way you are!
There is no love that does not ask to end!
Leaves in the woods, that's the way you are!
There is no love that does not ask to end!
Simbi en des Eaux,
Who comes from below the water!
See what they do to me!
I say, Lolo, give me the news to give them!

But if the loa complain about the behavior of their followers, the servitors also may complain. Songs sung in the hounfor may chide the deities for antisocial deeds, for forgetting their "children," or for carelessness. In the following song the spirit Mait' Grand Chimin is criticized for mounting his "horses" with such fury that they are thrown about 533 539 776 794 782 782

533
539
776 violently. The hounsi complain that Mait' Grand Chimin treats them
782 as though they were flour being ground in a mill:
●787

Temp' changé nouvelle allé!
Bonjou' Papa bonjou' Roi Grand Chimin!
M'mandé Papa ça'm fai!
Temp' changé nouvelle allé!
Bonjou' Papa bonjou' Roi Grand Chimin!
M'mandé Papa ça'm fai!
Papa m'pas maïs moulin!
Nou dit na bougit moin!
Papa m'pas maïs moulin!
Nou dit na bougit moin! [Ex. 85]

Times change, the news goes out!
Good day, Papa, good day, Roi Grand Chimin!
I ask you, Papa, what did I do?
Times change, the news goes out!
Good day, Papa, good day, Roi Grand Chimin!
I ask you, Papa, what did I do?
Papa, I am not corn flour!
You say you will grind me!
Papa, I am not corn flour!
You say you will grind me!

533
539 When there is sickness within the société there may be songs for the
531 absent ones. Here is a song for an ailing hounsi:
794
755

Moin allé wè là, hounsi malade oh!
Moin allé wè ça, hounsi malade oh!
Moin allé wè houngan, hounsi malade oh! [Ex. 86]

I am going to see there, the hounsi is sick, oh!
I am going to see it, the hounsi is sick, oh!
I am going to see, houngan, the hounsi is sick, oh!

Again, the members of the société call upon Ogoun, or St. Jacques, to help one of their number who is sick:

St. Jacques marré chwal li,	St. Jacques ties his horse,
Li pas dit personne oh,	He tells no one, oh,
Véyé li pou' moin!	Take care of him for me!
Li met gainyain verre,	He may have worms,
Li met gainyain maline nan dos,	He may have sores on his back,
St. Jacques oh!	St. Jacques, oh!
Ba li lavie pou' moin! [Ex. 87]	Protect him for me!

776: Ogoun is the dispenser of rum, and in virtually all Ogoun rituals rum
776 is at some time or another in evidence. Sometimes rum is poured into a hot
273 iron pot and bursts into flame. The iron pot is described as Ogoun's

The cow was

776 825 [783] [493] never seen again, and after a prêt' savane had read prayers over the spring the people again drew water from it.

Baka more often change themselves into gray or red pigs, but one ingenious baka was said to have transformed himself into a bicycle, which was seen traveling alone at night on the road from Port-au-Prince to Léogane.

776 789 824 Some people wear charms against the baka's malevolence; but the most effective weapon is the cocomacaque stick. The cocomacaque, or monkey palm, is a palm tree that grows only a few feet high. It has magical powers to drive off not only baka but other evil beings as well. When the tree is growing in its natural state, it is said, you must never mention its name in its own presence. Should you say within its hearing, for example, "Look at the cocomacaque," it will wilt and fall over, losing all its vital powers. The trunk of this midget palm is a favorite material for fashioning a walking stick or a short baton. A man going on a long journey into strange country may carry a cococmacaque stick with him to brandish at the crossroads where baka lurk, or to drive off strange animals that may be baka in disguise.

776 789 754 In their relationships with human beings, the baka are not always random. Sometimes, for a terrible price, they will undertake to make a man rich or to "eat" his enemies for him.

184 776 778 In some parts of Haiti, baka seemingly have found their way into the ranks of the loa. In the Congo-Guinée pantheon there is a deity called Bakulu Baka, or Babaku Baka. He is a malevolent spirit who "eats" people in the best baka tradition, and he lives, significantly, in the mapou tree, which is shunned by all good loa.

776 789 787 675 The *engagements,* or compacts, in which baka sometimes figure are usually made with another sort of creature, the *djab,* or devil. A djab is a manlike being but is superhuman, ferocious, and terrible. Some djab are small, some large, some innocent in appearance, some grotesque. They are supernatural sorcerers who deal out riches in exchange for human beings. A frustrated or desperate man may go to a djab and ask for a favor, which will usually be granted for a heart-rending price. Persons who appear to gain wealth suddenly may be suspected of having entered into an *engagement* with a powerful djab.

538 776 789 787 675 One story is about a man of Port-au-Prince who, needing a large sum of money, went to a famous djab who lives in a cave known as Trou Fourban. This powerful djab agreed to provide all the money required, but only on condition that the man deliver to him each year one of his children. The man suddenly came into a large fortune. But when the anniversary of his compact arrived, he did not go to Trou Fourban

with one of his children as he had agreed. That night his oldest child died. The next year to the day, his second child died. And the third year, the third child died. On the fourth anniversary, the man's wife died. On the fifth, he himself died. The djab of Trou Fourban had collected his debt. 538 776 789 787 675

Another great djab lives on the northern mountain called Morne Ronde. A man of Cap Haitien was said to have made a compact with him for wealth. One day there was a great hubbub in front of the man's house. A crowd gathered and stood peering inside his door. What they saw was a rain of money falling down from the rafters. The floor was covered with ten-gourde bills. When the *gendarmerie* came to investigate, they stood at the doorway in awe, watching the money float to the floor. The man finally closed the door. That night he moved away, and no one in Cap Haitien ever saw him again.

The djab are insatiable. For their favors—which range from providing wealth and political position to destroying one's enemies—they always demand more in return than the recipient has counted on. Catholic ritual is called upon in some instances to break the djab's chain of demands. 776 789 785 787 [777] [788]

Some tales are told in which human beings outwit the djab, particularly the lesser ones; but more often than not, the djab have the last laugh. During the big hurricane which hit Haiti in 1954, a huge landslide occurred near the place called Bayè Roche in the La Selle Mountains. An entire village was wiped out, covered by the falling rocks. Throughout this region the disaster was attributed to the action of a djab reputed to live in one of the nearby caves. Many lost cattle were found wandering near Bayè Roche, and they were believed to be people whom the malevolent djab had transformed into animals. 776 731

The height of bravado is to demand to be confronted with a big djab face to face. There is a song which goes: 776 554 539

Conduit'm allé oh!
Conduit'm allé djab nan Trou Fourban!
Conduit'm allé! [Ex. 91]

Take me, oh!
Take me to the djab in Trou Fourban!
Take me!

There are still other supernatural creatures in Haitian lore who must be guarded against, such as the *djablesse,* the *revenant,* and the *lutin.* The *djablesse* is a female ghost who must live in the woods for a number of years before she can enter heaven, as a punishment for the crime of 775

791
754

789 days, according to the bocor's prescription. It is also employed to protect an individual against various forms of the ouanga.

757 Against poisons, the usual protection is the *drogue,* prepared by a
787 bocor or a leaf doctor who specializes in such things. After having drunk
[791] a drogue, a man is regarded as immune to poison. Should a man be a
[759] "horse" of the loa Ogoun Balindjo, however, no drogue is necessary, for Balindjo's people are regarded as immune even without such precautions.

787 Foretelling the future and divination take two general forms. In one
[791] variety, a bocor or *divineur,* using ritual paraphernalia such as cards, flour, or ashes, takes personal responsibility for the divination. In the other form, the divineur functions only when possessed by a loa, and it is the deity himself who foretells and foresees. An account of this kind of divination is given in chapter 6. "Horses" of the loa Mâit' David when possessed are given packs of cards, for they are reputed to be able to divine the future.

787 Certain houngans use the instrument known as the *gembo* as a
793 divining device. This is a small shell about the size of a lemon, through which a long cord is passed. When there is no tension on the cord, the shell can easily be slid back and forth. When the cord is taut, the shell will not slide. The houngan holds one end of the cord under his foot, the other end with his hand above it. He starts his divination with the shell at the top and the cord taut. Shaking his asson with the other hand, he talks *langage* and asks questions. To indicate a "yes" answer he relaxes the tension on the cord and the shell slips downward an inch or so. The typical gembo is decorated with beads, old coins, religious medals, snake bones, and a fragment of mirror.

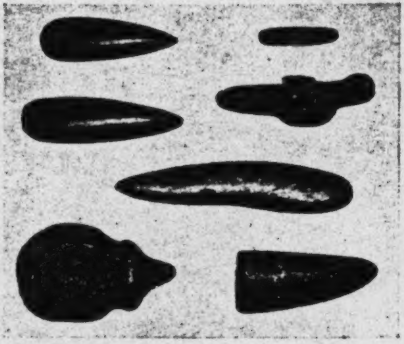
694 There are several ceremonies for locating a thief or other guilty
787 person. One is called *passage d'alliance.* A ring suspended on a string is held over a person's head. If it moves in a regular pendulous way, the person is innocent; but if it swings in a circle, his guilt is established. Another method is the use of a long stick. The stick is pointed at one man, then another, and when the end vibrates in a circular manner the guilty party has been located. This technique is known as *jugement de baguette.* A third method is the one known as *passé balai.* A man sits in a low chair and small branches and leaves of the *balai* (broom) tree are placed under the chair and fastened to its uprights. A guilty person sitting in this chair will cause the *balai* branches to vibrate and close in on him.

759 The role of the *docteur fé*—the leaf doctor—straddles the field of magic and pharmacology. Many of his potions are of a mystical and

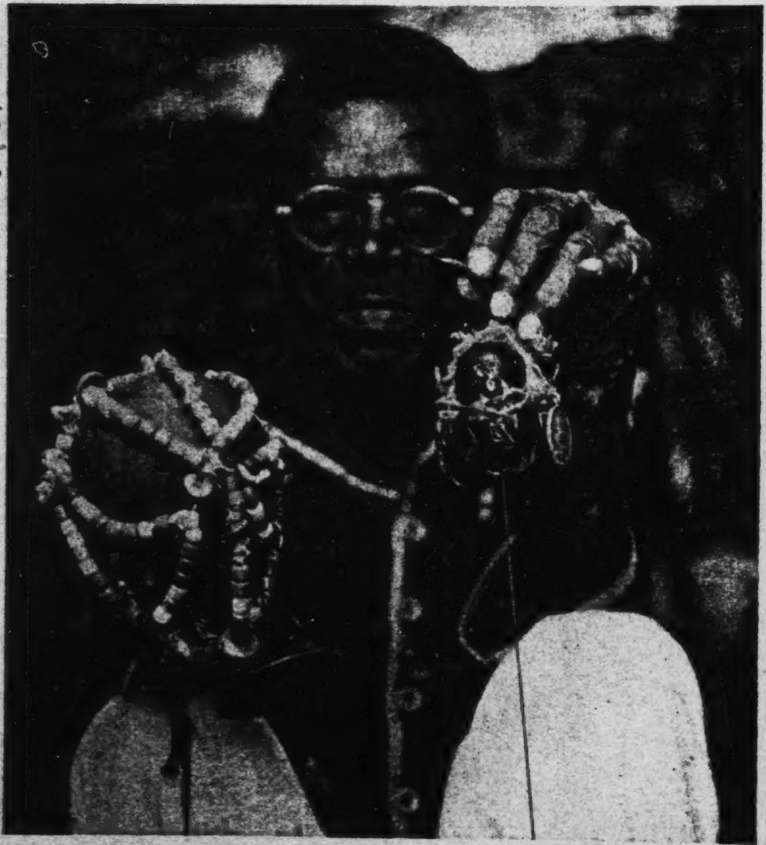
[P. 112-0]

778

22. *An assortment of stones (Indian artifacts) from the altar of a hounfor in the mountains above Jacmel. All are regarded as thunder stones thrown to earth by the loa Sobo and Kébiosu, or as stones containing the essence of other deities.*



793
● 787
778
142
302
416



23. *A houngan of southern Haiti divining with the aid of his asson, bell, and (right) gembo.*

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

[P. 112-U]

785
● 787
796
794

30. *A Christmas service near Léogane: ritual "bathing" in fire. The two young women are hounsi possessed by a loa of the Gèdé family, probably Jean Zombie. Their nostrils are stuffed with cotton and their jaws are bound in the manner of corpses, in honor of the deity, who is a "dead" loa. In a state of possession they seem to be impervious to the intense heat.*

[P.112-Y]

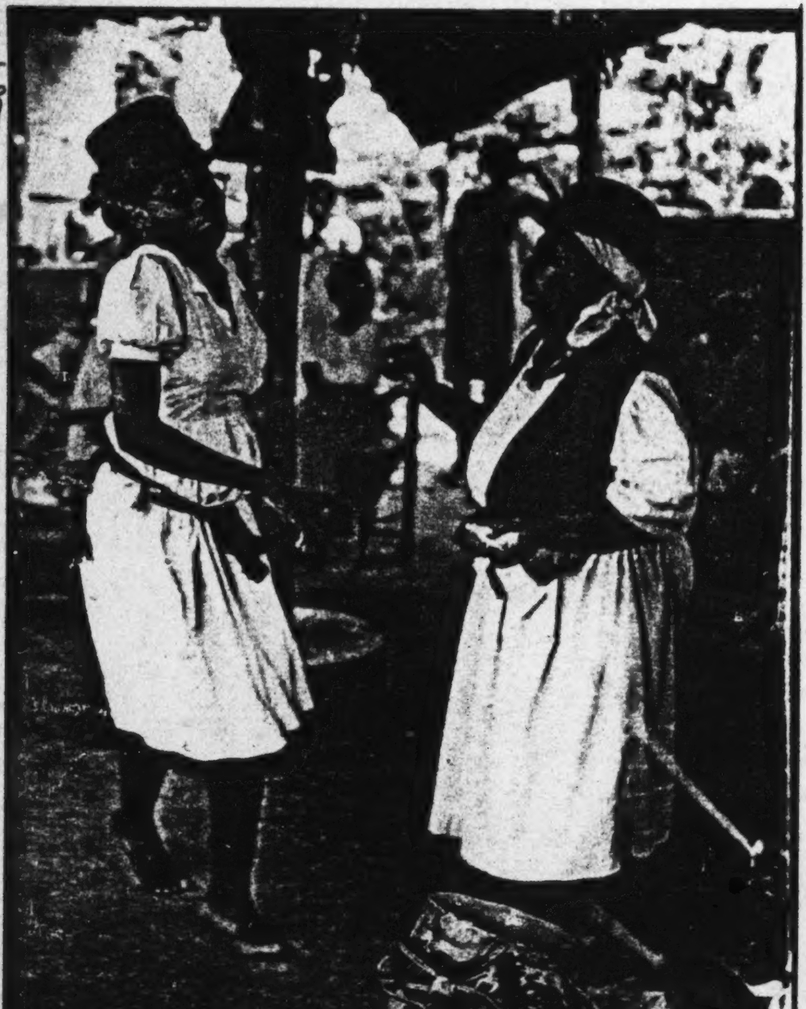
142
291
●787
794

35. *A hounsi in the first stage of possession by a loa.*

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

[P. 112-Z]

142
292
776
787



36. Possessed by the loa Gèdé Nimbo, two women dance the deity's favorite step, the Banda.

When I want to talk you do not want me to talk! 533*
When I want to sing you do not want me to sing! 539*
Dahomey *y wa*, they do me wrong! * 794
626

Another note of criticism within the hounfor concerns a person who has been putting on airs of importance. The song states that he (or she) in reality has not even qualified for the lowest order within the cult, even though he behaves as though he were the cult chief:

Ou poco hounsi oh!	You are not yet a hounsi, oh!
Ou dit'm ou c'est houngan!	You tell me you are a houngan!
Ou poco hounsi!	You are not yet a hounsi!
Ou dit'm ou c'est houngan c'est ça!	You tell me you are a houngan, it is so!
Oh Paille à Terre!	Oh, Straw on Earth! †
Poussé allé!	Push and go!
Oh Allada malade oh! [Ex. 99]	Oh, Allada is sick, oh! ‡

Poverty is so normal in Haitian life that a man who accumulates wealth in any form becomes conspicuous. Ordinarily he does not welcome this conspicuousness. It makes him a target of gossip and rumors, and of those who might wish to collect debts from him, borrow money, or obtain other favors. He becomes a *gros nèg'*, and finds himself increasingly cut off from the community of ordinary, poor people. Needless to say, Haitians, like other people, dream of striking it rich. Wherever poverty has been acute, whether in Europe, Asia, or America, the folklore is full of tales of finding great treasures. Haiti is no exception. Many Haitian folk tales and folk songs deal with this theme, particularly with obtaining wealth by magical or supernatural means. Sometimes riches are obtained through *engagements*, unholy compacts with devils or demons. In some stories loa facilitate the discovery of treasure, in others a powerful bocor accomplishes it through magical practices. If a man suddenly becomes well-to-do, therefore, rumors may spread in regard to how he came by his wealth. If he is suspected of dealings with devils or with a powerful bocor, his apparent success in his venture makes him a neighbor to be feared. To avoid incurring envy and hostility, people tend to play down their financial successes and pretend they have nothing in life but the clothes they wear, their houses, and their gardens. Spreading word that a poor man has hidden money is regarded as a mean and reprehensible act. Numerous folk songs protest against this injustice:

556
626
533*
539*
[735]
[787] ●
[776]

Désastre tombé nans lacour-wà!
Si m'apé travaille là nans cour-wà,

---

* Literally: They eat my rights.

† An exclamation, the name of a certain ouanga.

‡ Allada, the name of a town in Dahomey, used in the sense of "people of Dahomey." The line means, "Things are in a bad state of affairs."

776 a "nation" in the Dahomé rites; and the Ibo group, though still distinct,
184 is frequently allied with the Dahomé rites or the Guinée rites.
794 The following list does not pretend to include all the loa known in
Haiti. It is doubtful that a complete list could ever be compiled, in
view of the continual generation of new deities and the constant cross-
[128] fertilization between "nations." The loa are grouped here according to
most widespread usage. There are contradictions from which there is
no possible escape, and these general groupings will not necessarily
correspond to the concepts and practices of any specific locality. It is intended here to give a broad and generalized view.

128 Under "The Vodoun Pantheon" I have placed constellations of deities
776 of Dahomean and Yoruban origin, along with others that are clearly
794 identified with Vodoun rites. Under "The Congo and Pétro Pantheons"
I have listed the Congo-Guinée loa—consisting mainly of deities associated with Central Africa and deities affiliated with the Pétro rites. Ibo and Kanga loa are grouped together, because in many regions of Haiti the two pantheons appear to be interlocked. A separate listing is given for the Simbi family of water deities in view of their ambivalence; they are sometimes found in the Pétro group and sometimes in the Dahomé, according to local practice.

THE VODOUN PANTHEON

776 **Damballa Wèdo, or Dan Wèdo.** One of the most venerable of Haitian loa. He is
171 generally recognized as the husband of Ayida Wèdo, though occasionally the two
deities are merged in a personality called Damballa-Ayida. The concept of a single
identity for Damballa and Ayida conforms to Dahomean belief. In both Haiti and
West Africa, Damballa is identified with the rainbow and is symbolized as a snake.^
In Haiti he is associated also with rainfall, springs, and fertility. He is sometimes
[782] described as "white," and the proper food offering to him is a white chicken. Persons
● [787] possessed by Damballa usually take on stylized characteristics of snakes. Along with
[177] many other important loa, he has become identified with characters in Christian
religious belief. There are, in fact, "two" Damballa Wèdos. One, identified with
Moses, comes in talking; the other, identified with St. Patrick, never talks. Food
[782] offerings for the St. Patrick version of Damballa consist of eggs, flour, sugar, and
almond syrup. Damballa remains one of the chief gods of the Dahomey cult in
Cuba, and he survived into the last century in New Orleans under the name Danny.

[822] **Ayida Wèdo.** Generally regarded in Haiti as the wife of Damballa, Ayida is also
symbolized by snake and rainbow, and her color, like Damballa's, is "white." In
Dahomey and Nigeria, Ayida is known as a male rather than a female spirit and is
regarded there as the same divinity as Damballa, or Dji. In Dahomey, Ayida Wèdo
was the great serpent who held up the world. According to one myth, the Creator
of the World assigned to Ayida the task of holding up the earth to keep it from
falling into the sea. The great serpent coiled himself, tail in mouth, and lay below

^[Herskovits, *Dahomey*, II, 245 ff. Cf. p.354, Category 46. --Analyst]

[The Vodoun Pantheon]

the earth like the carrying pad that women wear to support bundles on their heads. [776]
Whenever Ayida Wèdo shifted his position there were earthquakes.[2] When the rain- [171]
bow appeared after a rain it was said that Ayida had come out from under the [821]
earth to drink of the fresh water.

Damballa Grand Chimin (Damballa of the Highway). Another manifestation of Damballa as a protector of those on long journeys. [484]

Damballa Verre. Another manifestation of Damballa.

Domici Wèdo. Considered to be the daughter of Damballa. The ending of her name (*-ci*) suggests that at one time she may have been considered a wife rather than a daughter.

Doki Wèdo. A member of Damballa's family.

Agão Wèdo. A member of Damballa's family. Said to be a "work loa" who aids men with their gardens, especially in time of illness. [241]

Êzilie Doba, or Dogba, sometimes spelled Erzulie. One of the "big" loa of the [177]
Dahomé pantheon, a symbol of purity, and sometimes identified with the Virgin [822]
Mary. Her color is white, and services to her include a ritual sweeping and sprin- [782]
kling of the earth and a perfuming of the air. Food offerings to her include corn [787]
meal and eggs. Male "horses" of Êzilie are sometimes bound to her by mystic [834]
marriages, and they are obligated to refrain from sexual intercourse on certain [588]
days which belong to her. There are a number of Êzilies, regarded as members of the same family or, in some cult centers, as different manifestations of the same deity. Some Haitians regard Êzilie Doba as the ancestor of the Êzilie family and refer to her as Grand Êzilie. Note that there is a Dahomean town named Dogba at approximately 0° 6′ E., 6° 50′ N.

Êzilie Fréda, or Êzilie Dahomain (Dahomé), or Êzilie Fréda Dahomain. Like [177]
Êzilie Doba, she is a symbol of purity and is identified with the Virgin Mary. [588]
Mystic marriages are performed with her, and her "horses" are obligated to re- [787]
frain from sexual intercourse on certain days. She is also a giver of wealth. [834]

Êzilie Wèdo. A sister or daughter of Êzilie Doba and also related to Damballa.

Êzilie Maisol. A sister of Êzilie Fréda.

Êzilie Banda. A manifestation of Êzilie who is especially fond of the Banda dance.

Êzilie Jérouge (Red Eyes). A stern and hard Êzilie who is often identified with Pétro rather than Dahomé rites.

Aïson Fréda. A member of the Êzilie escorte, regarded as a market-place protector. [443]
In Dahomey, Aïson was a protector of all public gathering places.[3] [171]

Aïson Beléketé

Aïson Dleau Bolo Bosu

Maîtresse Mambo. A special form of Êzilie as priestess.

Maîtresse Espagnole, or 'Pagnole. A person mounted by this Êzilie talks only [787]
Spanish. [191]

Sobo, or Sogbo. A thunder deity who hurls stones to the earth when angered. 776
Some of the stones thrown by Sobo are regarded as the sacred residence of various 171
loa. Sobo (or Sogbo) is a member of the original Thunder pantheon of Dahomey.

Sobo Badé, or Sobo Badè, or simply Badé. A close relative of Sobo, regarded as the protector of the hounfor (*badé*). In Dahomey, Badé is sometimes referred to as the son of the deity Sobo.[4]

[2] [See Ellis, The Ewe-speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa, pp. 47-49; and Herskovits, Dahomey, II, 245ff. Cf. p. 354 Category 116. --Analyst]

[3] [Ellis, op. cit., p. 52. Cf. p. 354, Category 116. --Analyst]

[4] [Herskovits, op. cit., pp. 152ff. Cf. p. 354, Cat. 116. --Analyst]

[The Vodoun Pantheon]

776 **Agomé Tonnerre**, also pronounced **Abomé Tonnerre**. Another thunder loa. Abomé (or Agbomé) is the name of an ancient capital of Dahomey.

Badisi. The wife of Sobo Badé.

[171] **So Narcisse**, also called Sogo Narcisse, or simply So. A thunder loa of Dahomean origin. In Dahomey he is regarded as an offspring of Mawu and Lisa, and a member of the Sky pantheon.

[171] [766] **Kébiosu**, or **Kébioso**. A thunder loa who, like Sobo, hurls stones to the earth. In Dahomey he is known as Xevioso and is thought to be the same deity as So. In Haiti, persons killed by lightning are thought to be enemies of Kébiosu and are given special treatment in burial.

---

776 782 [821] [822] [171] **Agwé Woyo**, known also as **Coqui-Nan-Mer**. He is a loa of the sea; thunder and lightning over the ocean are thought to be Agwé shooting his cannon. He is usually symbolized in pictures by a sailing or steam vessel. His colors are blue and white, and the primary sacrificial animal for him is a male goat. High ceremonies for Agwé are begun in the hounfor and consummated in a sailing boat on the open sea, from which is launched a highly decorated and stylized miniature ship containing food for the deity. This tiny craft is known as the *barque d'Agwé*. Hounfors honoring this spirit usually have a small boat hanging from the rafters. In Dahomey, Agwé is also a sea deity and a member of the Thunder pantheon.

776 [171] **Agwétta Woyo**. She is thought to be Agwé Woyo's wife, though in Dahomey she was considered to be his daughter.

Agwésu Wandéou. Said to be the son of Agwé.

La Sirène. Another deity of the sea, a latecomer visualized as a mermaid. La Sirène is usually thought of as belonging to a separate family, though she is frequently served along with Agwé. Some sociétés do not recognize her at all.

---

776 171 **Nananbouclou**, or **Nanan Bouloucou**. A loa of herbs and medicines. In Dahomey this spirit was considered the grandparent of all deities, the progenitor of Mawu and Lisa from whom all demigods are descended.[5] She is still remembered in the Dahomey cults of Cuba.

Lissa or Lihsa. Probably the Lisa of Dahomey, child of Nanbouclou.

---

[782] [778] [787] **Attibon Legba**, or **Legba Sé**. One of the most important of Haitian loa, frequently the first one invoked in any service. He is the guardian of the gateway, the crossroads, and the highway. Cocks and male goats are his favorite foods, as in West Africa. In Dahomean tradition, Legba is the youngest offspring of Mawu and Lisa, the progenitors of all Dahomean deities. He is a divine trickster who is both feared and loved, a force that is capriciously malevolent or benevolent. Today, as in earlier times in Dahomey, the image of Legba, made of clay, stands or sits before the entrance to many villages. Sometimes the image is nothing more than a mound or column of earth symbolizing a phallus. Legba's mischief and tricks are directed against the other deities and human beings. In Haiti, as in Dahomey, Legba is not a personal deity. As Herskovits points out, Legba has no "character" and cannot be relied on. He is the intervener between mankind and the deities. It is in this sense that he "opens the gate," providing a channel of communication between man and loa; and it is for this reason that he is often supplicated first in religious ritual. In Dahomean lore, Legba's mischief is often in the realm of sex. In ritual dances for

[5] [*Ibid*., pp. 101 ff. Cf. p. 354, Category 116. --Analyst]

[The Vodoun Pantheon]

dressed in a black frock coat, black top hat, and black trousers or a blue, white polka- 776
dotted skirt. He carries a cane and smokes a pipe or a cigarette, according to which manifestation of Gèdé he represents. He talks with a strong nasal accent, which is acquired by anyone mounted by him. Gèdé Nimbo is always asking for money. [787]
Persons possessed by him may rub hot peppers on their tongues or in their eyes. In some parts of Haiti, Gèdé is thought to be identical with Baron Samedi. In a Vodoun service, no other loa cares to enter while a Gèdé is present; and Gèdé delights in appearing suddenly, uninvited, and obstructing the orderly progress of a ritual. Although Herskovits points out that Gedeonsu, or Gèdé, is a Dahomean [171]
totem,[14] it is worth noticing that in Haiti the Gèdé rites are often regarded as belonging to the Nago "nation."

GÈDÉ NIMBO MAZAKA. A Gèdé brother.

GÈDÉ OUÈSOU. A Gèdé brother.

GÈDÉ L'ORAILLE. A thunder or storm Gèdé. Like the other Gèdés, he is closely associated with death, and he is considered more of a malefactor than most. He is repulsive in appearance, with a dwarflike stature.

GÈDÉ MIVÈVOU. A Gèdé brother.

GÈDÉ NANSOU. A Gèdé brother.

GÈDÉ NOUVAVOU. A Gèdé brother.

GÈDÉ VI. Said to be a son of Gèdé Nimbo, though some Haitians regard this loa as a female, possibly Gèdé Nimbo's wife.

GÈDÉ ZECLAI. A loa of lightning, thought to be responsible for death by lightning, [766]
violent death in general, and destruction of cattle and other property by natural forces. He seems to be a Gèdé version of Kébioso or Sobo.

JEAN ZOMBIE. One of the Gèdé brothers, a "dead" spirit.

GÈDÉ TI PISSE (Gèdé Little Flea)

GÈDÉ RACHÉ (Gèdé Tear Off)

GÈDÉ JOYEUSE (Happy Gèdé)

TIWAWÈ GÈDÉ, or GÈDÉ TIWAWÈ PANCHÈ. This Gèdé is one that makes mischief as he enters a hounfor service.

GÈDÉ ZILÉ (Gèdé of the Island)

GÈDÉ YALOVI

GÈDÉ YABOFÉ

CIRCLÉOUITTÉ GÈDÉ (The Gèdé Who Mows Down)

JINSIMAN BRITISSE. A loa who works with the Gèdé family, one of Gèdé Nimbo's graveyard assistants. He is described as having a white skin, suggesting that his surname is a corruption of "British."

MARIE GÈDÉ. A sister of the Gèdé brothers.

BALÉROUZÉ. One of the Gèdé brothers. His name means to "sweep and sprinkle," a ritual activity characteristic of certain Vodoun ceremonies.

MANZÈ BRIDGIT, or MANMAN BRIDGIT. The mother of the Gèdé brothers.

MALT' SANSAN. One of the Gèdé escorte.

BARON SAMEDI. One of a group of Barons who march with the Gèdés. They are so closely identified that some Haitians feel that Baron Samedi is merely another name for Gèdé Nimbo. Persons possessed in cemeteries are thought to be mounted [787]
by Baron Samedi or one of his brothers. Like the Gèdés, the Barons are spoken of as "dead" spirits.

BARON PIQUANT. The loa in charge of grave digging.

[14] [Herskovits, Life in a Haitian Valley, p. 267, cf. p. 354; Category 176. -- Analyst]

[The Vodoun Pantheon]

776 **Azagon Lacroix**, or **Baron Lacroix**. Spoken of as "chief" of the cemetery, the one who plants the cross over the grave.

Baron Poussiè, or **Pousiè** (Baron Dust)

Baron Sal (Baron Earth, or Dirty Baron)

Baron Chita. The Baron who sits on the graves.

Baron Tikalé

---

[775] [171] **Azaka Médé**, or **Zaké Médé**. Herskovits reports that Azaka Mélé is the name of the stream which Dahomeans believe all the dead must cross.[15]

[787] **Cousin Zaka**. The peasant Zaka, special patron of the country farmer and the people of the mountains. He is always portrayed as wearing the blue denim costume of the peasant, carrying the woven peasant knapsack called an *alfor cousin* and a cocomacaque stick, and smoking a clay pipe. Persons possessed by Cousin Zaka are dressed in this way, and they speak in the manner of the mountain man, a style that is heard only in the most remote communities.

Minisè Zaka, or **Ministre Zaka**. An aspect of Cousin Zaka. Ministre Zaka is a sort of Minister of Agriculture and a patron of peasant farmers.

Si Azaka. The wife of Ministre Zaka.

Azaka Tonnerre, or **Tonnè**. The Azaka who brings thunder and rain.

Azaka Baing Baing. One of the Azaka family.

Marassa. The loa of twins. The Marassa family of deities are in a special category, somewhat apart from other spirits. In an important Vodoun service, for example, there are invocations to the loa in general, to the Marassas, to the family ancestors, and to God.

Marassa Doçu. Patron of the first child after twins if it is a boy.

Marassa Doça. Patron of the first child after twins if it is a girl.

Marassa Blanc. Patron of white twins.

Marassa Trois. Patron of triplets.

Marassa Guinée. Patron of twins when one is a boy and one a girl.

Marassa Quat'. Patron of quadruplets, or of two consecutive sets of twins.

Marassa Bois (Marassa of the Woods). He is considered an "unbaptized" or "untamed" loa, and very savage. He likes sweets and never eats salt.

Marassa Dossué, or **Marassa Cinq**. Patron of consecutive twins and triplets.

Marassa Caille (Marassa of the House). This one eats salt.

---

[171] **Loko Attiso**. He is usually pictured as the protector of the hounfor, or cult temple, and as the keeper of the altar (*pé*). In Dahomey, Loko is a deity of the Sky pantheon and a son of the divine Mawu and Lisa.[16] He is still remembered in the Arara (Dahomey) cults of Cuba. He is also called Sindé or Singé.

Loko Attisogué. Said to be Loko Attiso's wife.

Loko Adäico, or **Däico**. A member of Loko Attiso's family.

Loko Däifrè. A brother of Loko Adäico (Däico + *frère*).

Loko Däinzo

Loko Tokamiwèzo

Loko Dahomé

Loko Bassiyé

Tos Loko

[15] [Ibid, p. 280. Cf. p. 354, Category 116. --Analyst]

[16] [Herskovits, Dahomey, II, 108-109. Cf. p. 354, Cat. 116. --Analyst]

[The Vodoun Pantheon]

Agão Loko Bayè. A crossroads protector of the Loko family.
Loko Dãi Pré

Dansi Osou. Among the Tshi-speaking people of West Africa there was a spirit called Adansi, a malignant giantess.[17] [171]
Osou Jamain
Sousou Yèmain

Zombra
Mazombra
Mazombra Enpaka

Amine. An aged female loa. Sacrifices to her consist of rice, sugar cane, lima beans, and eggs. As in services for the deity Ezilie, perfumes are used during services for her. [782]

Amine Gatioal Laflambo. A member of the Amine family. Amine is the name of a tribe of Dahomey.

Amine Nago. Another member of the Amine family.

Général Clermeil, or Président Clermeil. He is said to be the "father" and patron of all light children born to dark parents. Stories are sometimes heard of men who wrongly accused their wives of infidelity because of the lightness of their children, and who were finally mounted and punished by Clermeil. [787]

Clermézine. The light-skinned daughter of the dark Général Clermeil.

The family relationships or escortes of the following deities are not clear. Some of them may belong to one or another of the foregoing groups, or to still uncited families.

Adja. A female loa associated with the arts of pharmacy. The Yoruba of Nigeria had a spirit named Adja who carried men and women off into the forest to teach them about the medicinal properties of roots and herbs.[18] In Haiti, Adja's mangé consists of cookies and chicken. Persons possessed by her sometimes eat broken glass. [171] [782] [787]

Adja Bosu, Akadja Bosu, or Kadja Bosu. This deity is also known in Dahomey. [171]

Aganman. A male deity characterized as a *zandolite*, a small lizard capable of changing colors. A person mounted by Aganman sometimes climbs trees or posts. Some Haitians contend that a person possessed by this loa will change color, from dark to light. [787]

Agasu. In Dahomey, according to Herskovits, Agasu is the name of the panther fetish.[19] Dahomeans regard this deity as of special significance to the royal family. He was remembered among Negroes in Louisiana under the name Agoussou. [171]

Agasu Yemain. Related to Agasu.

Dadal. Among the Yoruba, Dadal was a brother of Ogoun and Chango, and was a patron of vegetables.[20]

Attisolé, also known as St. Soleil. Persons mounted as a result of exposure to the sun are thought to be possessed by this loa. The association of Attisolé with the sun may be a syncretism. [789]

Augshaut

Aza. A loa who likes the Juba dance.

---

[17] [Ellis, The Tshi-speaking Peoples of the Gold Coast of West Africa, p. 68. Cf. p. 354, Category 116.--Analyst]

[18] [Ellis, The Yoruba-speaking Peoples, pp. 79-80. Cf. p. 354, Cat. 116.--Analyst]

[19] [Herskovits, Dahomey, I, 165ff. Ellis, The Ewe-speaking Peoples, p. 83, says that this deity was especially important in the [illegible] of Agbome. Cf. p. 354, category 116.--Analyst]

[20] [Ellis, The Yoruba-speaking Peoples, pp. 45, 76. Cf. p. 354, Cat. 116.--An.]

[The Vodoun Pantheon]

776 AZUL. A snake deity.

BABOULE. A loa who likes the Baboule dance.

CALBASSIE. Loa of the calabash tree.

CHÉBO PROFILÉ. An ancient male deity. Herskovits suggests that he may represent [114] the leopard, *sébo* being the Fon word for that animal. The wildness of the attack [191] on the sacrificial animal by persons possessed by Chébo supports this conjecture. A deity called Dada Segbo is prominent in the Rada Cult of Trinidad.

SIMALO. A male loa who is believed responsible for fine physical proportions and bodily strength in men.

COQUI-NAN-DLEAU. Probably the same as Coqui-Nan-Mer (Agwé).

[191] AKADJA. This loa may well be the King Agadja of Dahomey who was said to be responsible for the coming of *vodu* (loa) into that country. Herskovits tells a legend about a woman named Hwandjile who prevailed upon the king to bring the *vodu* from the kingdom of Adja.[21] Hwandjile herself survives in Haiti under the name

WANILÉ, or HOUANILÉ

[821] [987] LINGLESSOU. A rainbow loa. Persons mounted in sight of a rainbow are thought to be possessed by this deity.

BLINGINSOU. "Marches" with Linglessou.

WANGOL, also called AGOVI WANGOL (King of Angola). This loa appears to be an interpolation from the Congo rites.

[989] ALOVI, or GADALOVI. A masculine, dwarflike spirit who likes to disarrange things and play practical jokes. Persons possessed by Alovi may break up gatherings, discommode spectators and dancers, and generally make a nuisance of themselves. Some Haitians regard this loa as belonging more to the Pétro pantheon than to the Dahomé.

MAIT' BOIS (Master of the Woods). May be an interpolation of Mait' Grand Bois of the Congo-Guinée pantheon.

MAIT' DLEAU (Master of the Water). May refer to the loa Simbi.

DAN WÈZO, or WÉZO. A loa known in the Artibonite region. The name is possibly a corruption of Dan Wèdo.

DJA KÉKÉ

EVO, or NÂO' EVO. The name is that of a tribe on the Calabar coast of West Africa.

FARO PIERRE. Said to be the son of Pierre Basice.

GÉNÉRAL YENBATISSE, or JEAN BAPTISTE. Probably the Christian name of some Dahomé loa.

GRAND LESSAIGNE. An aged, dwarflike loa, guardian and protector of children.

GRAND ALABA, or ALOUBA

GRAND ALOUMANDIA, or MANMAN ALOUMANDIA. Believed to be a loa who was mait' tête of the Emperor Dessalines. Some informants consider this spirit to be a démon or loup-garou rather than a loa.

HOUNTOR. The spirit of the Arada drums. There is a difference of opinion on whether Hountor is a loa in the precise sense or merely a drum spirit. The term is sometimes used to designate the largest drum of the Arada trio.

[184] JEAN BATEAU. A loa well known in the region of Léogane. When he "enters," the possessed persons talk *langage* into a *canarie* (clay water vessel).

[987] MAIT' DAVID. This loa always talks immaculate French, and persons possessed by him read cards and tell fortunes.

[21] [Herskovits, Dahomey, II, 104. Cf. p. 354, Cat. 116.--Analyst]

776 Simbi Wangol
Simbi Yampaka
Simbi Larouzé (The Dew Simbi)
Simbi Devant Bondieu (Simbi Before God)
Simbi Trois Fé (Simbi Three Leaves—the name of a pouin)
Simbi Trois Racines (Simbi Three Roots—the name of a pouin)

THE IBO AND KANGA PANTHEONS

Caplãou. A Kanga loa. His name appears to be a survival of the Caplaou tribe. Some persons feel he is a member of the Pétro group.

Ibo Foula. An Ibo loa. Note that both Ibo and Foula are tribal designations.

Ibo Mariani, or Marianné. An Ibo loa.

Ibo Héquoiké. An Ibo loa.

[782] Ibo Jérouge (Ibo Red Eyes). A malevolent spirit. Food offerings to her consist mainly of pigs and cocks.

Ibo Lazile. An Ibo loa. The food offering to this loa is a goat.

Ibo Lélé, or Ianman Ibo. An Ibo loa.

● [787] Kanga. A Kanga loa. A "hard" or "stern" spirit, thought by some people to be the same as Caplãou. Persons mounted by him play with fire and eat hot peppers.

Kanga Trois. A Kanga loa.

Legba Ibo. The Ibo form of the Vodoun Legba.

Marie Kanga, or Ibo Kanga. An Ibo loa.

Marie Louise. An Ibo loa.

Nikisse Ibo. An Ibo loa.

Ibo Suamenti. An Ibo loa.

Ibo Wankèsè. An Ibo loa.

Nomination. An Ibo loa.

Toumenti. An Ibo loa.

Barak. An Ibo loa.

Un Pied Un Main Un Jé (One Foot, One Hand, One Eye). An Ibo loa.

Akoupé. An Ibo loa.

De L'Air. An Ibo loa.

Papa Zao. A Kanga loa.

Zao Lanmé. A Kanga loa.

Kanga Langa. A Kanga loa.

Ça Ou Mangé Com Ça (What Do You Eat Like That). An Ibo loa.

Takwa, or Saint Akwa. An Ibo loa. When he comes in he speaks "unknown" languages.

THE CONGO AND PÉTRO PANTHEONS

Maît' Grand Bois (Master of the Woods). In Congo rites this loa is regarded as one of the most important of deities, holding a place equivalent to that of Damballa in the Dahomé service. When he "comes in" he makes a great din and racket.

Femme Grand Bois. The wife of Maît' Grand Bois.

2: Courlander 3-6 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

[The Congo and Pétro Pantheons]

Appendix 1: The Pantheons 331

Tijean Pied Chêche (Tijean Dry Foot). One of the malevolent Tijean brothers. 776
Timitta Démembré, or Kitta Démembré. Thought to be the son of Kita Sèche.
Yamoé Lemba. A deity of Congo origin.
Zilo Pimba
Zaka Tonnerre (Zaka Thunder)
Zaka Genli
Zaka L'Orage (Zaka Storm)
Yaki Bossou
Gouyamou
Mayélemba
Senegal (Senegal). When this loa enters, the mounted person talks "Arabic." [787] [191]

Notes

Chapter 1: *The Making of the Haitian* (pp. 1-7) σσb

[1] The name Canda survives in Haiti as the name of a deity.

[2] Herskovits, in *The Myth of the Negro Past* (p. 47), provides a tabulation of raw data [113] found in the manifests recorded for slaves shipped to Virginia between 1710 and 1769: [175] 20,564 slaves were reported shipped from "Africa," 3,652 from Gambia, 6,777 from [162] "Guinea," 9,224 from Calabar, 3,860 from Angola, and 1,011 from Madagascar. Of those [567] shipped from the island of Madagascar, 473 were listed as coming from Mozambique.

[3] Bartolomé de Las Casas.

Chapter 2: *Man and the Universe: Vodoun* (pp. 8-18)

[1] See Courlander, *Haiti Singing*, p. 7.

[2] Schweinfurth in *The Heart of Africa*, II, 31, says: "In Loango all exorcists and conjurors [113] are called ganga." Leo Wiener, in *Africa and the Discovery of America* (Philadelphia: Innes [193] and Sons, 1922), III, 32, reports: "Forms of *ganga* have in Bantu the meaning 'medicine' [187] ● but also 'magic'—such as Nyika *ganga* and Kongo *nganga*." [191]

[3] Gorer, *Africa Dances*, p. 125; Herskovits, *Dahomey*, II, 208 ff.

[4] From the Fon *hun-si* or *hun-so*. Among the Arada of Dahomey a *hun-si* was regarded as a spiritual wife of the deity. She was a servant of the cult temple, and in some instances a wife of the cult priest. [191] [194]

[5] Translated from the French of Aubin, *En Haïti*, pp. 57-59.

[6] Deren, in her *Divine Horsemen* (pp. 119 ff.), gives an excellent report of a service for [114] Agwé in a boat at sea. Aubin (*op. cit.*, p. 108) seems to have given the first description of [178] this service at sea for the loa Agwé.

[7] Leyburn, *The Haitian People*, p. 119.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 123. Leyburn advances the theory that Vodoun developed during this period [114] as a result of the vacuum left by the Church. Although the Church did in effect leave the [174] field to the African cults, one must assume that the Arada, Congo, and other cults were [175] already organized and possessed of great vitality before the Haitian revolution. Implicit [171] evidence points to a continuity of cult life from the earliest days of the African on Haitian [193] soil. There are no statistics to reveal the extent of cult membership at the end of the eighteenth century, but the content and form of Vodoun today are so overwhelmingly African that it is difficult to think of Haitian cult activity as the product of a renaissance.

Chapter 3: *The Lost Gods of the Haitian Mountains* (pp. 19-29)

[1] The term *vodoun*, used in this precise sense, conforms to the original Fon (Dahomean) 176 usage. The term [illegible], also of Fon origin, signifies "spirit" and belongs to the same root 192

776
192 as *hounfor, hounsi, hounguénicon, hountor*, etc. *Mystère* is of obvious French origin. *Loa* is probably from the Bantu, but it could be from the Yoruba.

[2] Various methods and formulas are employed in "tying" a loa. Sometimes making the sign of the cross is regarded as adequate, or the saying of a prayer. In "The Vodun Service in Northern Haiti" (*American Anthropologist*, XLII, 242–243), George Eaton Simpson reports that the "tying" of a loa sometimes results in a contest between the individual concerned and his houngan. If the houngan wants the *mait' tête* to come in, he must neutralize the ritual barriers the "horse" has put in the way. "One procedure for bringing on possession in a servant who has tried to 'tie' his chief god is for the priest to stand in front of the person whom he suspects, make the sign of the cross, and strike him on the forehead three times with a sacrificial stone. Usually these blows are hard enough to make blood spurt. The servant then begs the pardon of the angry god, and as soon as possible he unties the knots in his handkerchief [the method he has used for 'tying' his loa]."

000 [3] Herskovits, *Dahomey*.

CHAPTER 4: *Death Rites* (*pp. 70–91*)

775
171 [1] Maurice Delafosse, *L'Ame nègre*. Translation from *Free France*, special issue No. 4, French Press and Information Service, New York, June, 1945.

113 [2] Leo A. Verwilghen, in booklet describing peoples of the Kwango region, accompanying *Music of the Western Congo*, recordings issued by the Ethnic Folkways Library.

000 [3] Willoughby, *The Soul of the Bantu*, pp. 88–89.

[171]
[969] [4] W. M. Eiselen and I. Schapera, "Religious Beliefs and Practices," in Schapera, *The Bantu-speaking Tribes of South Africa*, p. 250.

[775] [5] Translated from the French of Aubin, *En Haiti*, p. 212.

[113] [6] Herskovits, *Life in a Haitian Valley*, pp. 213–214.

[7] Hall and others, *Haitian Creole*, American Anthropological Association, Memoir No. 54, pp. 188–189.

[8] Simpson, "Four Vodun Ceremonies," *Journal of American Folklore*, April–June, 1946, pp. 155–162.

[9] As translated by Courlander from Simpson's Creole text, *ibid.*, p. 156. The preceding paragraph is from p. 155.

[10] Translated by Courlander from the Creole of Simpson's text.

[11] This and the preceding paragraph are from Simpson, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

[764]
[766]
[793]
[776]
[787]
[525] [12] These shells, as indicated elsewhere, are part of the paraphernalia of the Vodoun priest and appear to be an inheritance from the priests of the Fa cult of Dahomey. The divining shells are usually thrown on the ground in fours, and the readings depend upon combinations of "heads and tails." The manner of throwing the shells, as well as the number used, corresponds closely with the Haitian secular gambling game *mayambo* (see Appendix 2), though the purpose is obviously different. In some priestly rites in Haiti, ashes rather than the customary shells are used for divining.

[13] Simpson, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 161.

[15] Herskovits, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

[764]
[766]
[114] [16] Herskovits (*ibid.*) notes that persons who die of smallpox, lightning, and certain other phenomena are not buried in coffins. Some of my informants indicated this to be their understanding also, but they said that the dead are buried without coffins for strictly economic reasons as well.

[17] Simpson, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

[18] Leyburn, *The Haitian People*, p. 156.

[19] Herskovits, *Dahomey*, I, 398.

[20] *Ibid.*, pp. 397–398.

[21] Herskovits, *Life in a Haitian Valley*, p. 214.

[22] Hall and others, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3

Vodun, then, was both widespread and powerful enough to be turned to most effective ends in 1791. Contemporary accounts of it still saw it as a meeting ground of superstitions. The French naturalist, Descourtilz, for example, was primarily struck by the use of the occult in connection with Vodun; he especially describes a woman who, under the seizure of her god, took a live coal in her hand without being burnt; a husband who by the use of magic struck his inconstant wife with a languorous malady, effective for half a year; and the knowledge of poison which was combined with the practice of magic. He mentions but one of the Vodun gods by name but implies the existence of many others.[10] 175 771 114 [787] [789]

Madiou, Haiti's first historian, likewise always spoke of Vodun as a savage survival; he says of a native general, "Lamour Dérance, plunged in gross errors, put his faith in *sorcery*, in the prophecy of *papas*, or priests of *African fetishism*."[11] In his scornful distaste for the vulgar he clearly indicated by his own italics some conspicuous elements of the developing religion: magic, the use of fetishes, and a Vodun priesthood. His illustration of Dérance's error was his making soldiers believe that bullets could not wound them: 114 771 781

> When he marched to combat he was proceded by bands of Congos, Aradas, Ibos, Nabos, Mandingues, Haoussas, who threw themselves against the French battalions with a prodigious intrepidity, crying that the bullets were but dust. But this courage which *superstition* fed was shattered against the ramparts of . . . the Europeans' square formations.

It is noteworthy that the first three black rulers set themselves against Vodun because of its potentialities for sedition. The plots to overthrow the old régime had come to fruition at apparently innocent Vodun dances. Although the ingenuous aspect of the dance gathering had deceived the white masters, Toussaint, Dessalines, and Christophe knew the meaning of the assemblies. All three had to drive their people hard and knew that resentment would be an inevitable consequence; it must not have an opportunity to burgeon at nightly gatherings. Toussaint was the strictest of the three, for he forbade all dances and nocturnal assemblage.[12] The other two singled 175 643 796 671 659 669 794 791

---

[10] M. E. Descourtilz, *Voyages d'un naturaliste en Haïti, 1799–1803* (Paris, 1935 ed.), pp. 116–118.

[11] Thomas Madiou, *Histoire d'Haïti*, III, p. 33.

[12] In an order of January 4, 1800.

776 commentators thought him the most important Vodun god.[24] There are two plausible reasons for this emphasis: Damballa is the bringer of rain, a necessity for good crops but a menace resulting in desolating floods when it is too copious; second, his symbol is the serpent. To Christians this is a symbol of such long standing that it is easy to assume in connection with its appearance in Vodun the guile, diabolism, or occult force which it has at times represented in Christian tradition. Damballa, however, is certainly not evil in the same way as Satan; he is not even generally baleful. To honor him is quite fitting, and this attitude is at poles removed from the diabolism [136] of the Middle Ages. There are practically no snakes in Haiti. Because of Damballa's symbol he is quite naturally associated with Saint Patrick.[25] Like Maîtresse Erzulie, all his sacrificial animals must be white, for this is his color. Like her, too, he is Dahomean in origin and therefore Rada.

These three, Legba, Erzulie, and Damballa, can by no means be conceived as a trinity. On the contrary, it would be easily possible to select an entirely different group from the commonest loa, justifying inclusions and eliminations. There is, for example, Ogun, the god of war, who derives from Nigeria in Africa. Ogun can, if properly persuaded, protect his petitioners against bullets and weapon wounds. Like blood, he is red. This is also his favorite color, and so he prefers sacrifices of red cocks and food offerings of red beans with rice. There are likewise Damballa's wife, Ayida Oueddo, whose symbol is the rainbow; Agwé, god of the sea; Baron Samedi, patron spirit watching over cemeteries; Simbi, who lives in mango and calabash trees and is a bit too fond of drink. In any one country district, certain other loa might far outshine any of those mentioned. The longer one lives among the people, the more clearly he sees the validity of the first article of the creed: "I believe in gods and spirits."

• 787 "I believe that these loa have power to possess their worshipers . . ." It is more difficult to make intelligible to "civilized" people the phenomenon of possession than any other part of Vodun religion. Centuries of training in self-control have made us unwilling to give public vent to our emotions, whether religious or, indeed, of any sort. Not only does our tradition of good manners inhibit such expression, but in the case of religion the nature of our worship interposes 787 barriers between us and the manifestation of feeling. Almost every denomination which has risen to prominence, no matter how anti-ritualistic in its beginnings, has grown more formally proper as it moved from simple meeting-houses to churches, or as it began to draw upon the middle and upper classes for its clientèle, if its origin was humble. Not many Americans would care to recall the fact that their own ancestors rolled upon the ground in religious frenzy or were seized with uncontrollable fits of jerking and shouting when "the spirit of the Lord" was upon them; yet such emotional displays were a regular feature of camp meeting revival services in the Ohio Valley frontier region and elsewhere.

---

[24] See, for example, Bonneau, op. cit., pp. 23–26 n.

[776] [25] He is sometimes also associated with Moses, who "lifted up the serpent in the wilderness."

In order even vaguely to apprehend Vodun possession, one must 787 disburden one's mind of all notions of formalism, for although the priest as officiant has his place in the service, there is direct participation 796 of the people in every Vodun service and dance. The religion is theirs, not the priests'. One must forego the idea of self-restraint, adopting rather the view that the chief end of worship is to establish direct communication with the gods. One must forget the belief that to lose consciousness, roll one's eyes, scream, and speak in a strange voice are signs of mental derangement, and regard all these abnormalities as very desirable achievements in religious life, symptoms to be contemplated with satisfaction by friends and family. A person possessed has no retrospective feeling of shame. Quite the contrary: he has won through to new peace and security, for a god has spoken through his mouth, revealing divine will.

Vodun possession is therefore something more than the elation of 787 the Holy Roller, and less than the mystical exaltation of the enraptured saints, yet partaking of elements of both. The descending afflatus is more discriminate than in a Holy Roller service, for rarely is more than one out of five worshipers seized by the god; inversely, it is more general than the ecstasy of a saint, whose experience is partly notable because it is rare. Actually, there is in civilized experience no precise parallel to Vodun possession, which runs the gamut of emotions from gay fun to mordant depression. To emphasize the uniqueness of the Haitian variety of possession, it must be noted that it occurs according to definitely understood rules and clearly defined circumstances. If a worshiper in his enthusiasm should let himself be seized "out of turn," so to speak, he would be instantly called to order.

787 The language of possession is descriptive. When a god seizes a man, he "mounts" him; the possessed person forthwith becomes the god's "horse." The words are accurate, for the god seems to have as much control over his mount as a human rider would have over a horse whose will he dominates. The person mounted does nothing of his own accord while he is possessed. Under the invisible whip of the spirit-rider the "horse" does a great many things, and says even more, that would be unnatural or even impossible to him, unridden.[26]

Possession is more than the affair of a moment. In this respect it differs again from kindred seizures known to whites. A person may have to wait for many years before he is finally mounted, but the first loa who descends upon him is the chief of his deities, taking precedence over any other who might subsequently possess him. The initial seizure is a vitally important experience, corresponding roughly to the conversion or confirmation of persons in other religions. The subject is carefully observed by experts, so that no mistake will be made in the deductions from actions and speech as to the identity of the god. This loa is baptized by sprinkling water on the head of the possessed person. Thereafter the loa is called "*maît' tête*," as a recognition of the subservience of his mount: any agreement the devotee might make with another loa under a particular possession would have to conform to the initial agreement with the maît' tête. At a man's death the loa, which has, like more than a guardian angel, accompanied him through life, is taken from his head so that the man's soul may go to God—the Christian God.[27]

The possessing god may be either male or female. It frequently happens that a male loa mounts a female devotee, in which case she is addressed by a male name, wears male clothes, eats and drinks the things her loa prefers (no matter how distasteful to her ordinarily), and otherwise manifests his characteristics. This extraordinary change of personality is accepted naturally enough by the other participants in the rites, although the transformation is to foreigners a psychological phenomenon of prime interest. Dr. Dorsainvil devotes a book to the neuroses connected with possession; as he says: "One of the first consequences of the Vodoun crisis is the substitution for the

---

[114]
[192]

[26] Zora Neale Hurston, in her gaily written *Tell My Horse* (Philadelphia, 1938), has a vivid chapter on the possession effected by the distinctly Haitian loa, Guédé. She entitles this chapter in Creole: "*Parlay cheval ou*" (Tell my horse)—the words with which the loa begins to dictate through the mouth of his mount. See pp. 232–250.

[27] See Herskovits, *op. cit.*, pp. 146–151.

787 normal personality of the subject a second, accidental personality which, except in the cases of conscious simulation, introduces real modifications in the ordinary state of being of the possessed person."[28] The phrase is noteworthy: "except in the cases of conscious simulation." Since the possessing loa frees his mount of his normal personality, certain persons at times try to pretend that they have been mounted in order to gain a desired end, which may be amatory, vindictive, or whatever. The people, however, are well acquainted with the normal penchants of everyone in the community; when they have their doubts about the authenticity of a seizure, they can easily by teasing words arouse the pretender's quite normal anger, by ingenious movements call forth an everyday response and so make the "mount" betray his ruse.

Since the main emphasis of this chapter is upon the religious, not the psychological, aspects of possession, no more than a passing reference can be made to the absorbing question of the normality of seizure. Two facts are important: it is confidently expected that possession will occur at every significant service; and it is known beforehand that not every worshiper will be subject to it. Some of the people seem to be definitely incapable of intense religious feeling or expression, others react almost immediately with overwhelming emotion, still a third group senses the mystery but cannot take the final step of inspiration.

114 787 Dr. Dorsainvil, a physician and historian, considering the recognized capabilities and limitations of Vodun worshipers with regard to seizure, maintains that possession is a species of neurosis, resulting in part from the historical tradition which makes seizure respectable and desirable and in part from the inheritance of neurotic tendencies in families. Professor Herskovits, an anthropologist and ethnographer, avers on the contrary that possession is, in terms of the patterns of Haitian religion, not abnormal but normal. He would stress the first of the two facts above: seizures occur at all important services. He does not deny the release afforded from psychic tension by yielding to possession; also he grants that the seizure might secure for a man the fulfillment of his suppressed desires for material goods or physical satisfactions. What impresses him, however, is the rules which rigidly govern possession. Gods are permitted to come only to members of the family giving the rite—that is, if the loa are under

[28] Dorsainvil, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

787 proper control, as they should be. If an unwanted god persists in
114 mounting an individual, the pertinacious one is commanded to go
away or the victim himself is sent home until he can recover his own
personality. Many people strongly resist possession when it is imminent.
Judged by our own standards, possession of the Vodun
variety could certainly not be called normal; judged by Haitian
standards, however, it would be absurd to call abnormal an experience
known and approved by the majority of the community.[29]

796 Possession occurs either at the service or at the dance. Here again
535 the white man has nothing in his religious experience to enable him
787 to comprehend the pattern of Haitian religion. The service corresponds
nearly enough to the Catholic Mass or to more realistic
sacrifices in ancient Jewish rites, but neither of these faiths nor any
other the white man knows well has dancing for religion's sake. In
Vodun, however, the dance is of equal importance with the service.

776 In the tiny *houmfort* (also spelled *hounfort*) of the priest, which is
346 little more than a hut with earthen floor, the service begins. To call
796 this structure a temple is at once to make it too imposing and to
confuse the white man in his attempt to understand the scene; it is
no more of a temple than was a tiny primitive early Christian
church. Most houmforts in Haiti would be crowded if twenty people
were present. At one end is an altar, more or less resembling the high
altar in a Catholic chapel; on it are placed a crucifix, flowers, candles,
fruit and food, wine, lithographs of Catholic saints, and whatever
other objects, Catholic or Vodun, local practice may dictate and
individual taste prefer. Upon the floor are traced formal cabalistic
patterns, generally in corn meal, both to fend off evil influences and
as required by the particular loa. The officiants may be male or
female or both. To the service ordinarily come only the members of
the family and their specifically invited guests; neighbors and friends
will attend the subsequent dance.

796 A student of Catholicism would find in the first part of the service
788 a great deal of ritual borrowed from the Church. The blessing,
177 genuflections, making the sign of the cross, responses, and the like,
782 all clearly show a Catholic background which accords well with
787 certain objects upon the altar. Imperceptibly the strictly Vodun
element obtrudes itself. The loa are asked whether they will accept

---

[29] The statement of the two sides of this controversy may be found in Dorsainvil, op. cit., throughout; and in Herskovits, op. cit., particularly pp. 146–147.

the sacrifices; food is set before the sacrificial animal, and if this food 796
is eaten by the creature or creatures, it is known that the loa is satis- 782
fied. Then comes the actual sacrifice of the animal, a slaying neither 787
ostentatious nor dramatic, since often it does not occur in the houm- 788
fort itself. It is at this juncture that possession is looked for. The loa,
by seizing one or more of his devotees—or, if possession fails, by the 177
divination of the priest—makes known his desires. The demands of
the loa are likely to be modest: a candle, a special article of food,
certain specific attentions. Occasionally he insists upon an impressive
sacrifice. Whatever his desires, they must be gratified or else the loa
will mildly harass the family; long refusal will produce anger and
full vengeance. If the god is Rada, his sacrifice will be white, red, or
vari-colored; if he is Pétro, he will wish black or gray animals—
chickens, turkeys, goats, bullocks.

The service itself, then, is entirely religious in nature, consisting
wholly of ceremonies and rituals conducted by officiating priests,
with the purpose of restraining or pacifying gods who may have
been pursuing a family with misfortune, or gratifying those who
have made it happy. The dance following the service apparently 796
expresses the joy of the family at dangers averted and gratitude for 535
blessings bestowed.

In contrast to the private character of the service, the dance has all [782]
the appearance of a social event. Invitations to it are sent all over the
countryside. People attend for good fellowship, gossip, and the sheer
delight of dancing, but in the background one is always aware of a
religious element as well. The dance is held in a specially constructed [346]
tonnelle, a roof of boughs and leaves supported by uprights. Drums [534]
are not always used at the earlier service, but no dance could be held
without them. The crowd drifts in slowly, so that the dance may be
long in getting under way. The best drummers in the community
may not arrive until after two or three hours. Three drums of
different sizes, all properly baptized, set the rhythms, and sometimes
gourd rattles embroider a commentary upon the beat. Whereas at 796
the service possession comes as a result of the priest's invocations, at 535
the dance it is inspired by the drumming. Each loa has his own 787
particular rhythm, so that as soon as it is determined what god has
seized upon a dancer the drummers take up the rhythm of that god.
The officiant immediately rushes to the mounted person with a
calabash of water and a candle; by following the "horse" around and

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3

796 steadying his attention, he practically hypnotizes him back into full
535 consciousness. As soon as the possessed is normal again, water out of
● 787 the calabash is poured at the central post and a sign of the cross is
made with the candle before it.

796 Contrary to the expectation of thrill-seeking white visitors, the
535 Vodun dance does not merit the name of an orgy. True, the dancers
786 wear their old clothes, for they are going to have violent exercise;
true also, those who are possessed give the impression of losing some
of their inhibitions. But the dancers do not embrace each other as at
a white man's dance; the drinking which occurs is hardly ever excessive;
and the climax of a successful dance is a religious experience.
[830] The Haitian is no more obsessed by sex than is the American; indeed,
living simply and without many of the artificial restraints of "civilization,"
he is probably less so. What white visitors sometimes see,
under the impression that they are witnessing a Vodun dance, is
nothing more than a secular Saturday night social dance. It, too, has
drum rhythms instead of an orchestra, musical instruments being
rare in Haiti; but the dance has no more religious (or "Voodoo")
significance than a barn dance in the United States.

771 Creed and practice go hand in hand in Haiti. The Vodun worshiper
776 believes in the loa of his faith and does the things necessary to
get in touch with them. These conceptions are the major part of his
creed, as the corresponding actions form the bulk of his religious
activity.

171 A few articles of the creed remain. "I believe in respect to twins
. . ." Hundreds of so-called primitive peoples see in twins some special
845 significance, now fortunate, now tragic. Many of the tribes along the
787 Atlantic coast of Africa thought of twins as an omen, so that the
presence of ritual regard for them in Haiti is hardly surprising. It is
probably incorrect to speak of the worship, or the cult, of twins, for
they are not deified, nor is there a common ritual for them: thousands
of persons pay them no homage whatever. One family has a
high regard for twins because it has numbered them among its
ancestors or recent relatives; another family pays respect to all twins
because a priest has advised seeking the good luck which comes from
[782] *marassa* (twins). There seems to be some confusion of thought about
this aspect of religion: twins are not gods, but merely omens from
the gods; yet sacrifices are made to them. Christmas and harvest are
the usual seasons for the offering. Food is prepared in the morning

and set apart on special plates in a separate room for them; in the 171
afternoon the family eats the food. If the twins to whom homage is 845
being offered are still alive, they must wear special clothes at the 787
sacrifice. [782]

"I believe in the careful cult of the dead . . ." Once more it is 761
necessary to renew one's acquaintance with primitive and folk belief
to grasp the Haitian attitude. Life is desirable, death is dreaded; both
death and the dead are feared. In the actual world, any excursion
from the comfortably familiar countryside of one's home leads to
confusion and bewilderment. Except in the company of his fellows [166]
(on a religious pilgrimage to the waterfalls at Ville-Bonheur, for
example), a Haitian almost never leaves his valley or mountainside
and market town. Sophisticated people view the unknown with [181]
pleasurable excitement, for they have learned by experience that the
unfamiliar is not necessarily frightful; it is quite the contrary with
simple folk, whose meagre experience with the unfamiliar has been
at least somewhat alarming.

Death is the ultimate unknown. The fearsomeness the imagination conceives to lie beyond death seems to exist in almost direct proportion to people's ignorance of the material world. The fear of ghosts is a commonplace among primitive folk, as among the uneducated in the "civilized" world. Where ghosts are considered powerful, one part of any comprehensive cult will certainly deal with the dead.

In Haitian Vodun the teachings of the Catholic Church have 769
exerted more influence upon the cult of the dead than upon any other 177
part of the religion. The preparation of the corpse for burial shows
no traces of African practice; the watch (or wake) and wailing over [764]
the deceased is familiar; the funeral itself is conducted by a Catholic
priest, with burial in consecrated ground. Thereafter, the continual
efforts to secure the tranquil repose of the departed bear the earmarks
of faithful Catholic practice; it is at this point, however, that the cult
begins to assume distinctive features, for it is firmly believed that the
dead exert tremendous power in the world of the living. This power
comes from God—the Christian God. The case has been put succinctly by Sumner and Keller: "The relation between man and 114
ghost resolves itself . . . into a relation of rights and duties, with all 116
the rights on one side and all the duties on the other."[30] God gives 769

---

[30] W. G. Sumner and A. G. Keller, *The Science of Society* (New Haven, 1927), II, 829.

114
776 the dead a right to whatever their survivors possess, and moreover
769 gives them the right to return to earth as ghosts.[31]

769 Strict rules of mourning prevail, both as regards clothing and behavior. The slightest lapse in the observation of these rules would
765 cause resentment on the part of the dead; fear of retribution would
775 be quite enough to ensure conformity even if public opinion did not.
782 Ghosts have the power to possess mortals, not as the loa do at a Vodun service or dance, but in the manner understood by American Negroes who say they have been "ha'nted," and so, continually thinking of the dead, live in nervous fear of a streak of bad luck. Such possession is a form of persecution, with continual consequent bad luck until the survivor has carried out all his obligations. It is especially significant, however, that a departed spirit takes vengeance only in matters thought by the Haitian to concern the Church. The ghost is not whimsical in his possession of mortals, and cannot resent treatment which is his due. The kind of treatment given a corpse depends upon the kind of death he died: a person struck by lightning, for example, would have no ceremonies at all, for lightning is an act of God.

787 Where the cult of the dead departs entirely from the teachings of
775 the Church is in the matter of magic, a topic shortly to be treated. It
789 may be briefly stated here that ghosts can be summoned back by special adepts for purposes of divination; that certain corpses are thought to be revivified by evil persons who use these soulless, pathetic automata as slaves (these are the notorious *zombis*); and that black magic—that is, powerful influence for evil—can be worked by sorcerers who know how to command ghosts.

771 All other articles of the Vodun creed not already discussed, except one, come under the heading of magic. That exception is the
798 statement: "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church." The fact is as simple as the affirmation. If the Catholic priests fight Vodun, preaching frequently against its beliefs and practices, that is unfortunate, think the peasants: Vodun does not retaliate by fighting Catholicism. God and the saints have their province, and the loa theirs. The mind of the Haitian is simple enough to accept both sets of spiritual beings, and not philosophical enough to worry over the contradiction. Practically every Vodun worshiper thinks of himself as a Catholic.[32]

---

[31] See Herskovits, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

[32] In this sketch of the Vodun creed, it has been constantly emphasized that each locality has its own variations both in belief and practice. The reader who is interested in pursuing the subject further should consult the works of Price-Mars, Herskovits, Dorsainvil, Parsons, Hurston, et al. See Bibliography.

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3

Worship of the loa is directed by priests and priestesses. They grow 793
into their positions by a kind of tolerant apprenticeship. Young men and women discover their abilities in dealing with loa or their desire to participate actively in serving them; they assist the officiating priests; they listen carefully to the lore of their elders, keeping their eyes open meanwhile. The priest is generally called a houngan, or
sometimes a *papaloi;* the priestess a *mambu* or a *mamaloi.*[33] No cere- [192]
mony marks the progression of a novice through any set stages to final priesthood; rather, the people in the community simply recognize growing expertness. The more effective and capable a houngan, the greater his prestige and the wider his reputation. There is nothing even vaguely resembling the ordered hierarchy of priests in the Catholic Church, nor is there any control of one houngan over another. No holy robes adorn the officiants, although they occasionally wear certain colors or ornaments to please the loa. Most of the Vodun priests and priestesses are simple peasants, working in the fields and going about the daily round of life. When they are called to perform a ritual, an offering is taken up in the early part of the service to recompense them for their offices.

Actually, the Vodun houngan and mambu correspond much more 793
closely to the primitive medicine man or shaman than to the Catholic 755
priest. They are thought to have power, through certain Rada and 787
Pétro loa, to cure illnesses caused either by adverse magic of one's enemies or by a loa; they are not able, however, to cure sickness sent by the Christian God. Likewise they can remedy or avert misfortune whose origin is magic or the loa. One of their highly important functions is foretelling the future: no important service would be contemplated by a family without previous resort to divination to determine the propitiousness of the time, nor would it be sensible to undertake a secular business of importance without preliminary reassurance by this means. To see into the future effectively, the priest must be possessed by the loa.[34]

[33] The second of these names in each case derives from "papa" and "mama," or [192]
master and mistress; and from the familiar loa or god. It is not implied that the officiants dominate the loa but only that they deal expertly with them.

[34] In addition to the houngans and mambu, there are also *bocors* who specialize in [791]
magic without conducting regular religious rites. These bocors probably deserve the name of sorcerers.

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3

798 chapel, wended their way down the hill and across to a clearing
796 among the trees. On the way many of the women stopped beside the path to pluck a handful of long grass or reached up to break
177 twigs from the smaller trees. At the clearing, primitively decorated with colored cloth, the priest made a short discourse; then he intoned three times, "Notre Dame d'Alta Gracia," and the worshipers, raising their wisps of greenery above their heads, rustled the twigs until the air was filled with a sound like the hissing of many serpents. "*Priez pour nous!*" they responded each time to the rustling accompaniment. The Virgin of Alta Gracia is the miraculous saint of Higuey, as much renowned among Haitians as among the Spanish-speaking Dominicans farther east. The supplication to the Virgin is proper enough to a Catholic feast, but the hissing, reminiscent of Damballa, is an intimation that the Vodun loa is not yet forgotten on his holy hill.

This festival of Notre Dame d'Alta Gracia shows not only the adaptability of Catholicism to Vodun, but likewise that of Vodun to Catholicism. Not even with the will to preserve their faith and practice pure can most men resist the infiltration of surrounding beliefs; in Haiti, the will to resist is itself lacking. This the Church knows, and counts upon for ultimate victory. In other words, there is to be not precisely a conversion of worshipers away from Vodun, but a slow transformation of Vodun itself into a true Catholic faith within the hearts of the people.

In its long experience in adaptability, the Church has in many a country learned to establish a ground of common understanding with lowly folk, while keeping its touch with aristocrats. Following the principle that where a belief or rite is apparently ineradicable it is advisable to turn it to Catholic uses, the Church in Haiti has often made this kind of adjustment, just as in earlier times with the Aztecs, Mayans, and other continental American Indians. An example of it may be observed at Saut d'Eau, near Ville-Bonheur.

787 Here, near the centre of Haiti, in 1884 there appeared in a palm
775 tree the vision of a beautiful Virgin blessing the people. She re-
795 mained so long that according to tradition the whole countryside saw her. The parish priest, unwilling to permit this obsession of the people to continue, came to drive away the apparition. The Virgin departed, apparently of her own will. People saw her no more, but many came to the palm tree and were miraculously cured and

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966

SV3 Haiti SV3

marvelously aided in distress. The priest, not willing to allow even this "delusion," tried to cut down the tree but was wounded by his own machete. Eventually, however, the tree was destroyed by natural causes, and a church erected on the site. Fire destroyed the church. Each successive church building has likewise been destroyed, by fire or by lightning. No longer now does the Catholic Church combat the sanctity of Saut d'Eau: after all, it was the Virgin who appeared, not a loa. The great celebrations on every fifteenth of July draw pilgrims from all over Haiti. Although the Church now grudgingly approves the feast it is still recognizably Vodun in character, for devout souls who bathe in the water are "mounted" by loa. The Church has a hard battle ahead of it to win this festival for Catholicism. 787 778 798 [796]

Three factors work in favor of the Catholic struggle to win Haitians completely away from Vodun: the world-wide organization of the Church, which can always throw trained reserves into the battle; the superior intellectual equipment of the priests, enabling them to plan their campaign and use psychological weapons; and the plasticity of Vodun itself, which is a conglomeration of human feelings, ideas, and traditions rather than a rigid sect with an inflexible ritual.[3] Even with these advantages, it is still the battle of a few dozen men on one side with the Haitian masses (more than two million) on the other. So far as one is ever justified in prophecy, it seems safe to assume that Vodun will continue to assimilate more and more fragments of Catholicism; that its appeal will remain so long as education and medicine are not extended to the whole countryside; that eventually—it may be centuries hence—Vodun rites may sink back into the status of living folklore, to which the simple turn in their deepest need. 771 177 798 [795]

One of the strongest missionary advantages of the Roman Catholic Church has been the breadth given it by two thousand years of experience. In so long a life it has had to be all things to all men; out of necessity it has developed around the central core so wide a variety of belief, doctrine, form, and traditional practice, that there is something for every believer, whether scholarly or untutored, powerfully important or humbly obscure. What the cultivated [795] [797] ~~780~~

---

[3] The absence of any written formulation of Vodun must certainly be a factor in its pliability. Recorded tradition and written history tend to create definiteness of pattern. [771]